FINANCIAL TIMES
HTSI
28 FEBRUARY
2026

HE'S THE DADDY

Stellan Skarsgård leads the family issue

A SPRING ARTS SPECIAL WITH **NANCY NICHOLSON, LOIE HOLLOWELL, ELLIOT & ERICK JIMÉNEZ, NELL MESCAL, SUZU HIROSE AND MORE**

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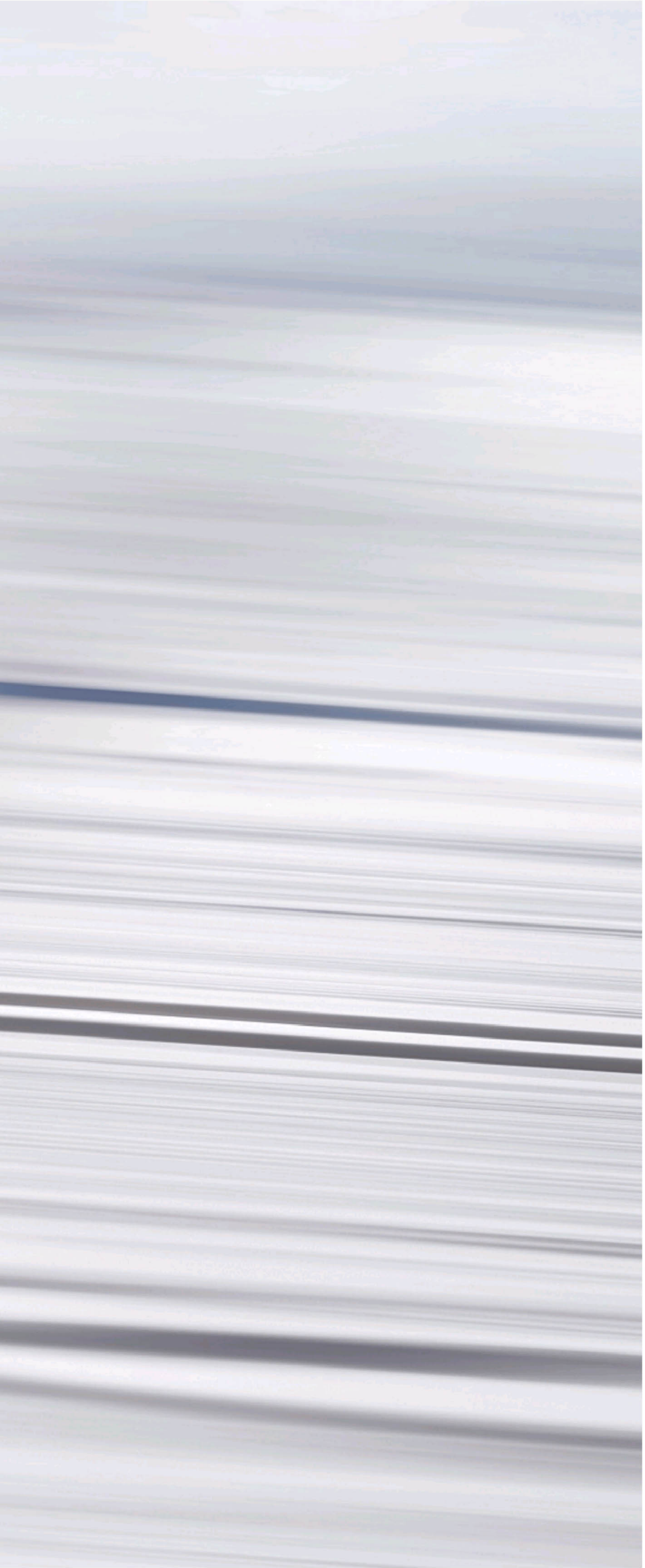

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HTSI
HE'S THE DADDY

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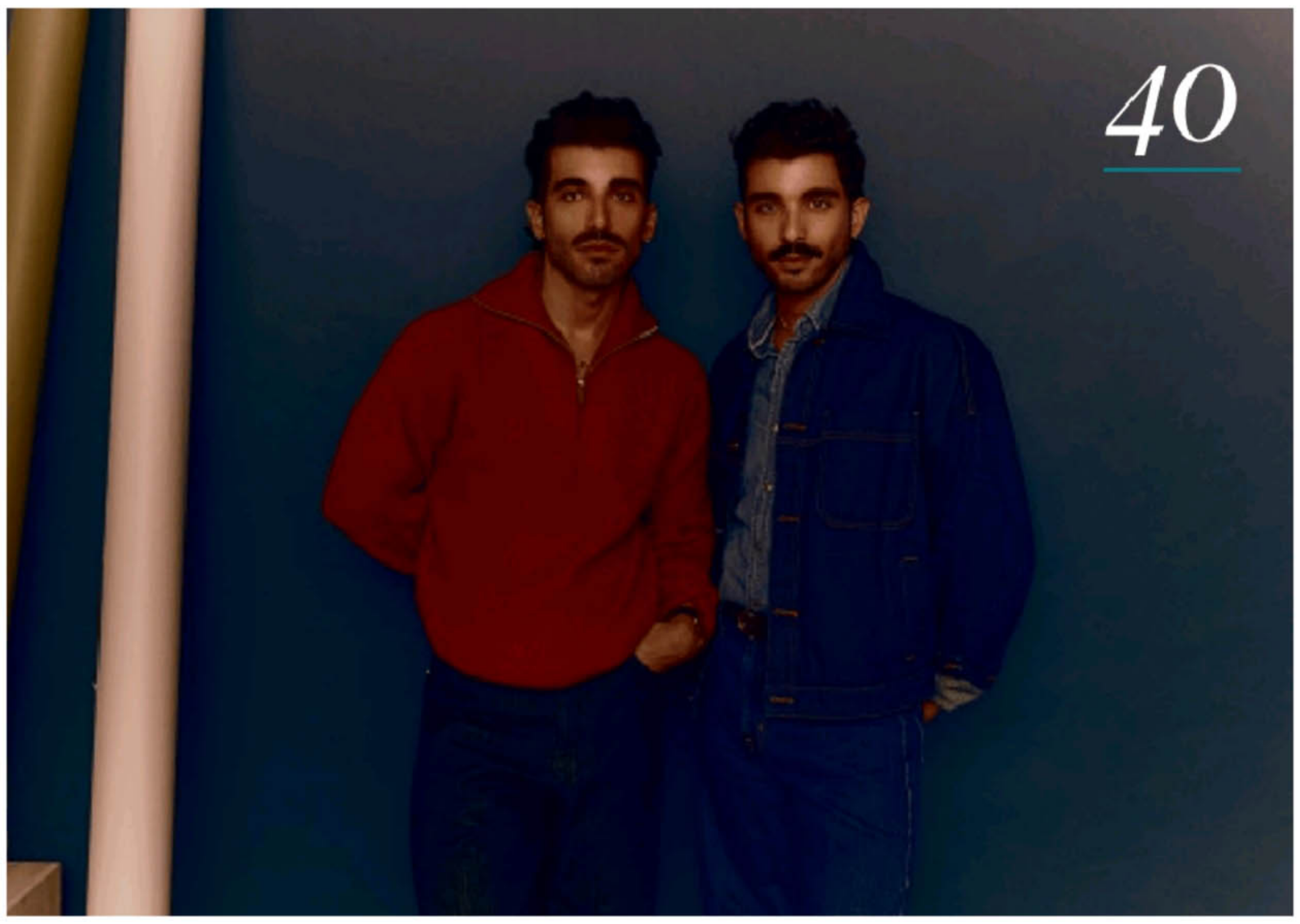
Styling by JULIAN GANIO

STELLAN SKARSGÅRD wears VAQUERA faux-fur coat, POA. HERMÈS cotton poplin shirt with breastplate, £1,014



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PHOTOGRAPHS: ELLIOT & ERICK JIMÉNEZ. FRANKO KHOURY/NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AFRICAN ART, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION. KEIR LAIRD. NELL MESCAL WEARS CHANEL LEATHER COAT, POA

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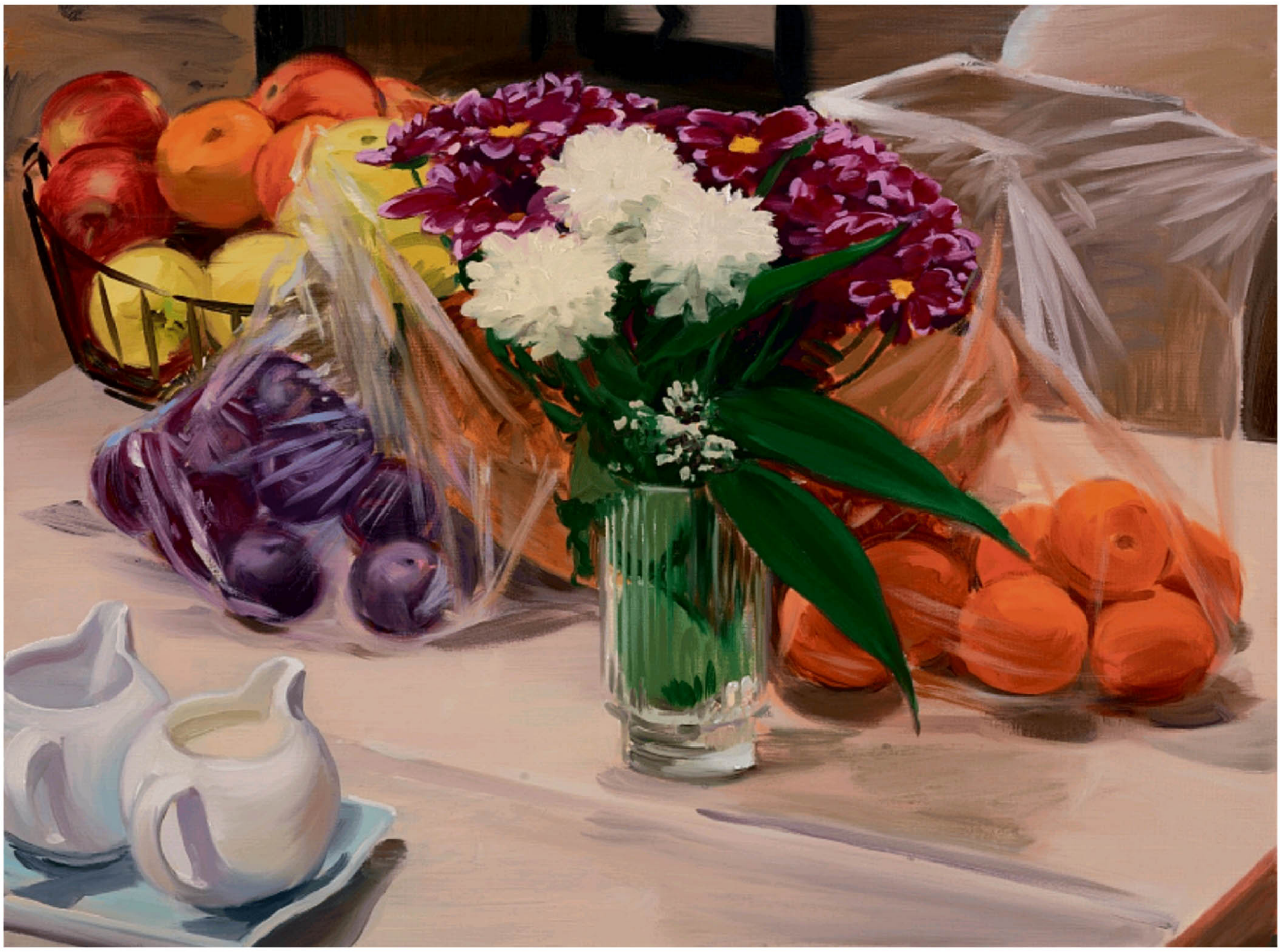
Hermès, crossing horizons

OPENING SHOT



CARE PACKAGE

Artist friends of Kettle's Yard raise funds for the Cambridge museum

Kettle's Yard, Cambridge's beloved house museum and gallery, was founded in 1957 by art patrons Jim and Helen Ede. "The Edes didn't just like artists, they were devoted," says director Andrew Nairne. "We've inherited a tradition of being very supportive." Today, as the museum attempts to secure a £5mn endowment fund by its 70th anniversary, it has asked its creative community to return the favour. *Artists for Kettle's Yard* is a fundraising exhibition featuring donations by a host of the gallery's loyalists, from sculptor Sir Antony Gormley to Dior creative director Jonathan Anderson, who staged a fashion presentation at Kettle's Yard in 2016 and has donated a brooch in the shape of a pigeon. Other highlights include Chantal Joffe's "very personal" portrait of her daughter Esme and a new painting by Caroline Walker depicting plastic-wrapped fruit "with the ability of Manet or one of the great impressionists", says Nairne. "It will feel like a celebration of Kettle's Yard as a place that cares about artists," he concludes. "And artists care about us." **MARION WILLINGHAM**

Artists for Kettle's Yard is at Kettle's Yard, Cambridge, from 14 March to 12 April; kettlesyard.cam.ac.uk. Artworks will be sold at the museum and online; select works will also be auctioned at Sotheby's in June

Snack Table by Caroline Walker, one of the works in *Artists for Kettle's Yard*

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ASHLEY OGAWA CLARKE

The British fashion journalist has been based in Tokyo since 2022, and mostly writes about menswear and Japanese fashion. For this issue he interviewed actress Suzu Hirose ahead of the release of *A Pale View of Hills*, the film adaptation of Kazuo Ishiguro's debut novel, in which she stars. "Interviewing Suzu was an exercise in speed and precision," he says. "We only had a short window of time, but sometimes pressure drives great results."

TESS AYANO

The New York-based photographer, who spent her formative years in Tokyo, attributes the "timeless and cinematic quality" of her work to a love of film and early-20th-century photography. While shooting Suzu Hirose for this issue, Ayano asked the actress about her culinary highlights from a recent trip to New York City. "Without hesitation she answered ramen and yakiniku – Japanese barbecue – which made the entire crew laugh," she says.

KEIR LAIRD

Originally from Glasgow, Laird has spent the past decade in London working in fashion and portrait photography – although his favourite project to date documents a Romanian family who rescue street dogs. For *HTSI* he shot singer-songwriter Nell Mescal at The Devonshire pub in Soho. "Our Celtic heritage helped us find common ground quickly," he says. "The only challenge was when the hairdryer tripped the power."

ARASH KHAKSARI

The Tehran-born photographer moved to France at the age of 14. Soon, two of his works will enter the public collection of the Palais Galliera in Paris. He's now working on his first book that weaves together "surrealism, poetry and the human figure". For this week's cover story he shot actor Stellan Skarsgård. "When Stellan arrived at the studio, he was calm, smiley and greeted absolutely everyone. You could immediately feel his incredible energy."

PHOTOGRAPH: CAROLINE WALKER, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST; GRIMM, AMSTERDAM/NEW YORK/LONDON; INGLEBY GALLERY, EDINBURGH; AND STEPHEN FRIEDMAN GALLERY, LONDON AND NEW YORK/ISLA MACER LAW

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Right: Stellan Skarsgård wears DUNHILL wool and silk coat, POA. HERMÈS cotton poplin shirt with breastplate, £1,014. CHARVET silk tie, POA. Trousers, boots and watch, Skarsgård's own (page 42)

This season's arts theme took root while I was watching Joachim Trier's *Sentimental Value*, the story of a family overshadowed by a domineering director father who returns home after a long absence and disrupts the fragile equilibrium. The subject matter is Chekhovian in its presentation, and the plot is made even more intriguing by the fact that lead actor Stellan Skarsgård is himself the *paterfamilias* of an extensive creative brood.

I love any art that grapples with the basics. Save your big explosive plotline, I want tiny dramas about family relations, sibling dynamics and the filial loyalties and betrayals that tell us who we really are. Eldest daughters, toxic fathers, single mums and only children: the identities that we are bequeathed as babies may be clichéd, but they can also provide some of our most telling traits.

In this issue, we meet identical twins, baby sisters, mothers and, of course, Skarsgård (page 42) – the big daddy of cinema – to explore family and its universal themes. Skarsgård claims to be the opposite of the parent he portrays in *Sentimental Value*. He's far more giving, relaxed and non-confrontational, he says. Nevertheless, for every artist there is always the dilemma of how much you offer of yourself to others, and how much you pursue more selfish creative goals. Some artists can be monstrous and totally removed from normal interactions. Others like Skarsgård have preferred to "wipe asses" and do the cooking while they tried to do the work.

> SAVE YOUR EXPLOSIVE PLOTLINE, I WANT TINY DRAMAS ABOUT FAMILY RELATIONS

Loie Hollowell has used her experiences of pregnancy and childbirth to create a feminist oeuvre that pulsates with "cosmic energy". Victoria Woodcock enjoys a tour of the artist's New York studio and finds it replete with squirting nipples, domed bellies and bold motifs that pertain to lady parts (page 35). At a stage when so many women struggle to align their professional and domestic identities, Hollowell has totally intertwined the two.

Identical twins Elliot and Erick Jiménez, meanwhile, use their psychic connection to make richly symbolic photographs (page 40). Their work, exploring their Cuban heritage, draws on Spanish Catholicism, spiritism and the west African Yoruba belief system in which *ibejí* (twins) have their own deity.

Nell Mescal is still best known as actor Paul's little sister. But the Irish singer-songwriter, seven years her brother's junior and just as ambitious, is carving out her own career. Chris Allnutt meets her following the release of her second EP, and as she is about to embark on a European tour (page 52).

Chosen families are a different kind of touch point, as musician Yasmine Hamdan explains in How To Spend It In… Beirut (page 69). The singer moved around a lot as a child, only returning to the Lebanese capital as a teenager in the '90s when the city's "battle scars were everywhere". Speaking to Arwa Haider, she says: "The 'typical' Beiruti traits seem paradoxical: bombastic yet resilient; edgy yet conservative; unbreakable yet worn." Still, everyone keeps moving forward: "There is solidarity despite everything. Continuity… is a strength." ■**HTSI**

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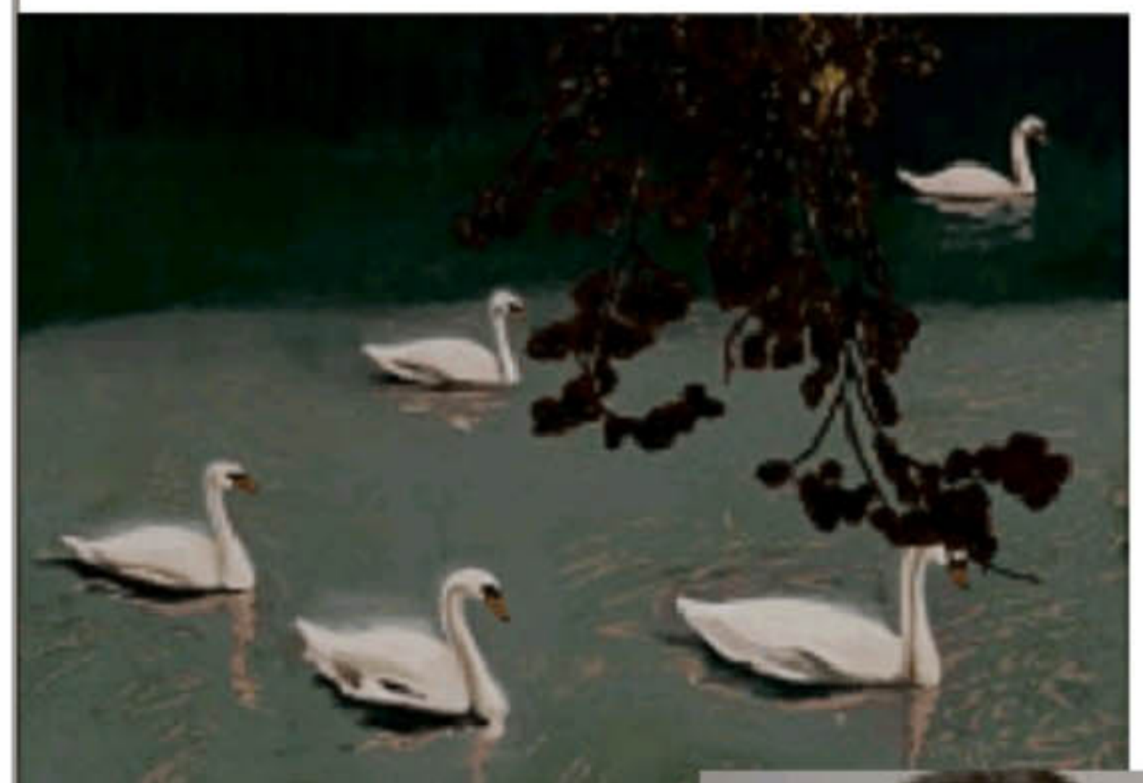

SWAN POND, 2016, BY MAMMA ANDERSSON (PAGE 33)

PHOTOGRAPHS: ARASH KHAKSARI. MARILI ANDRE. PER-ERIK ADAMSSON/COURTESY OF GALLERI MAGNUS KARLSSON

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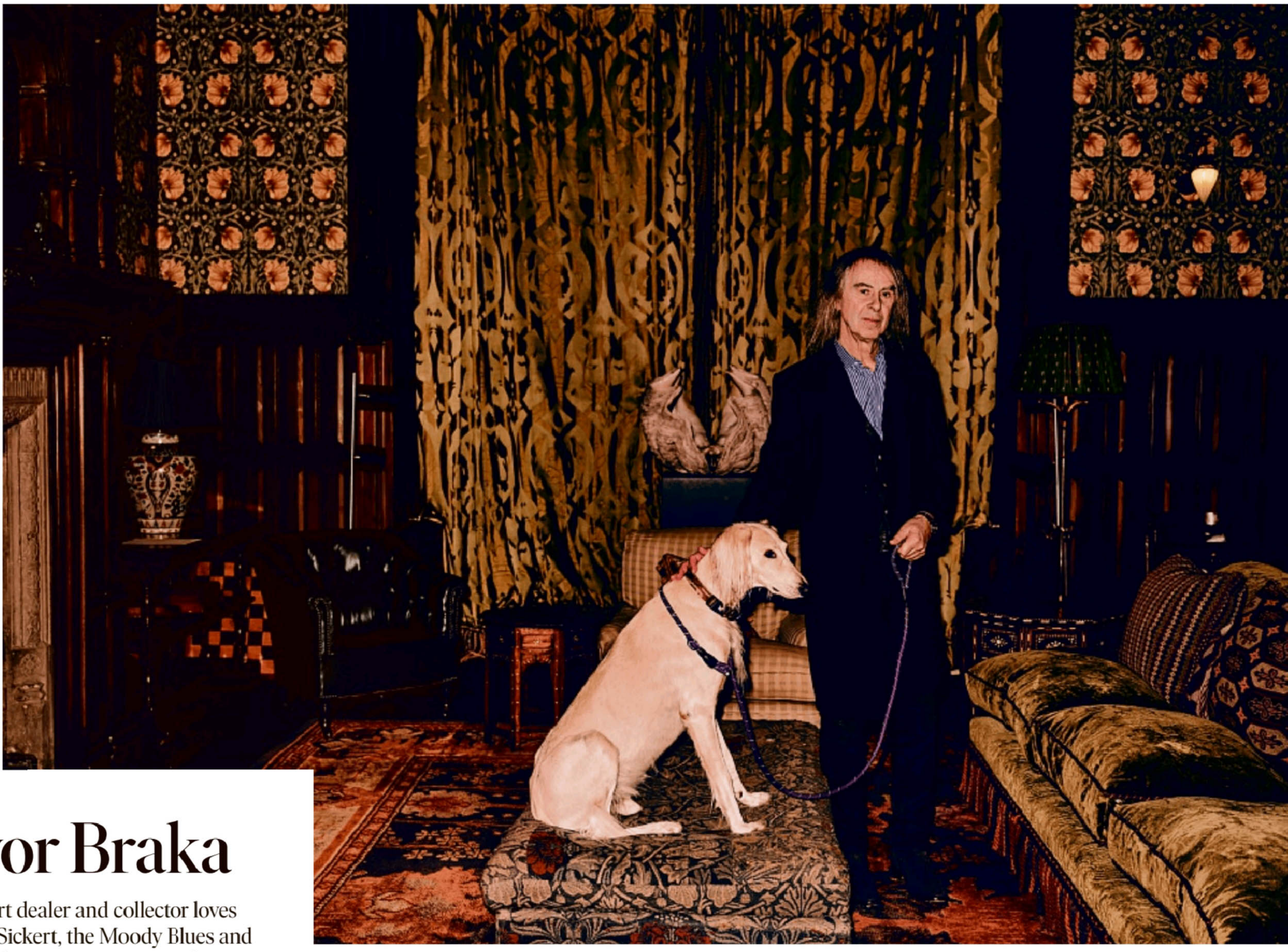
Right: Ivor Braka in the office of his London home with Sami, his Saluki. Behind him is *Museum Specimen of Giant Clam Shell 1*, 2010, by Damien Hirst



A MAGNUM OF VINTAGE KRUG IS ONE OF HIS FRIDGE STAPLES

Ivor Braka

The art dealer and collector loves Walter Sickert, the Moody Blues and finding community in pubs

INTERVIEW BY **BETTINA VON HASE**
PHOTOGRAPHY BY **JULIAN BROAD**

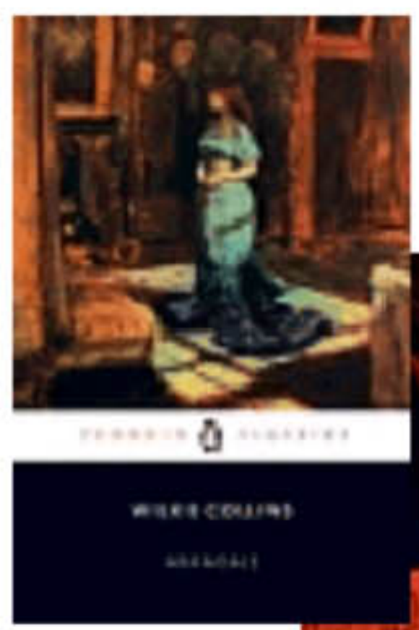
MY PERSONAL STYLE SIGNIFIER is my long hair, which I've had since I was 10. That may seem conventional today, but in 1964 it was going against the grain. My father called me a pansy, which in those days was a designation of queer… which I wasn't. But he thought I looked like one. I also love to wear black leather waistcoats. I have a collection of them, all bought from a wonderful shop off Rodeo Drive in Los Angeles called West. It sells cowboy boots, which I'm addicted to wearing. I have them in lizard and gator.

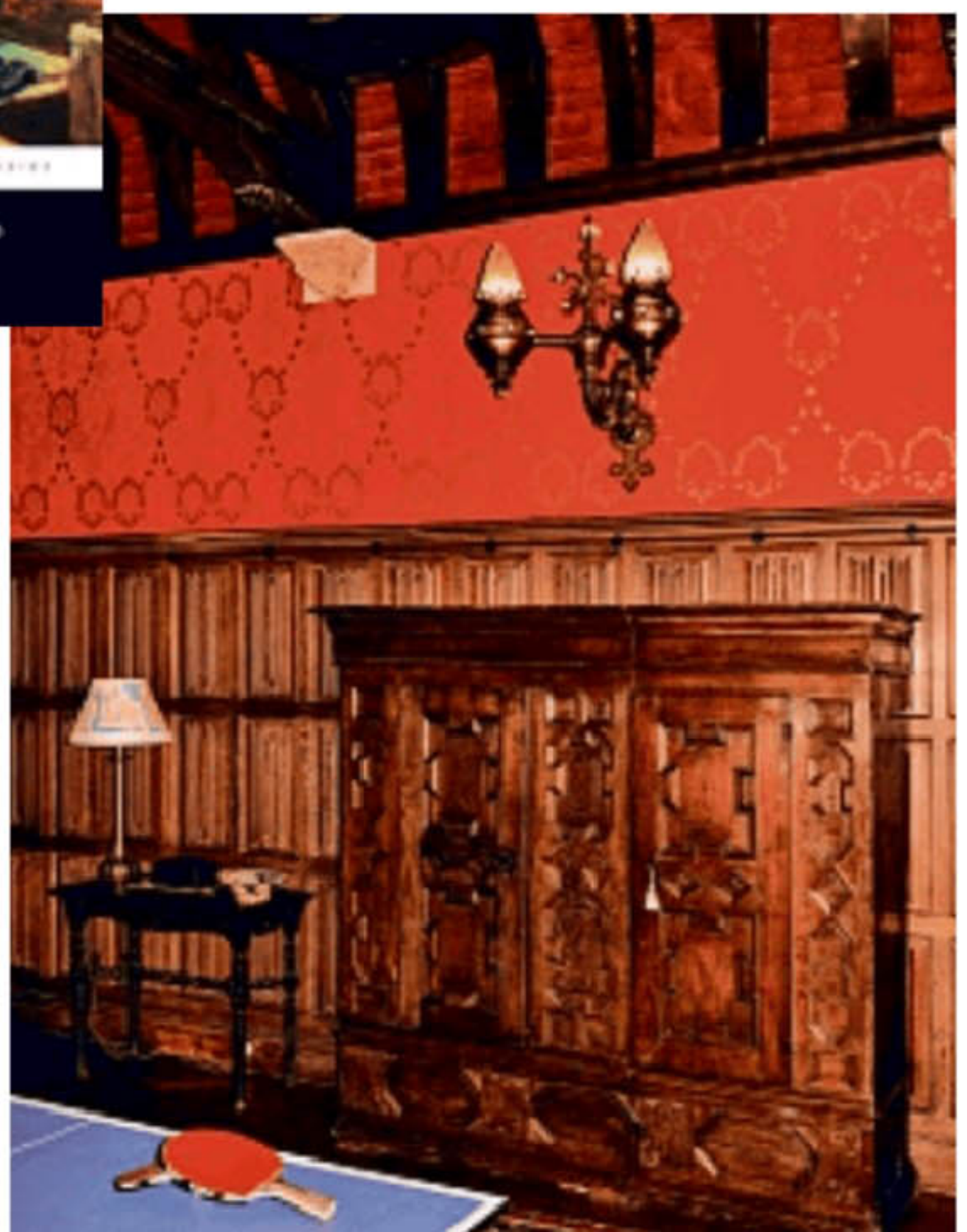
THE PLACE THAT MEANS A LOT TO ME is Manchester. I grew up in the beautiful countryside of Cheshire, between Alderley Edge and Macclesfield. I spent my childhood playing with my friend Graham Moss in the woods, and it always makes me think of what George Eliot referred to as the "sanctity of memory". Perhaps we see those places through rose-tinted spectacles but we can never regain the intensity of feeling we had then. Playing in the woods in Alderley is what matters most to me; we went down old copper mines, potholing and inventing games. Now I live in Cadogan Square, London, in a five-storey northern-gothic house built by Harold Peto and Sir Ernest George in 1886.

I HAVE A COLLECTION OF 19th-century furniture – Edward William Godwin pieces, William Morris fabrics and rugs, Christopher Dresser metalwork and ceramics, and William de Morgan tiles and plates – all 1860 to 1900. I also have an art inventory connected to my dealing business; I started collecting in 1978. In retrospect it feels like I had a crystal ball. I was buying Bridget Riley, Francis Bacon and Stanley Spencer then. As a dealer, you need to have a perception of what's going to have cultural resonance way ahead of time.

BEING AN ONLY CHILD has made me depend on friendships. I value human relationships that I choose rather than having them imposed upon me.

THE BOOK I'M READING AGAIN is *Armadale* by Wilkie Collins. It was written in the 1860s; one character is a flame-haired temptress called Lydia Gwilt. She's a femme fatale whose idea of fun is to annoy men. I'd pass that on for a racy read. A brilliant book I wouldn't pass on, because it's too harrowing, is Émile Zola's *La Débâcle*, about the appalling misjudgement of Napoleon III in taking on [German chancellor Otto von] Bismarck in the Franco-Prussian war. The vivid descriptions of amputations, people dying in the mud, horses' bloated corpses floating down the river and the endless charnel-house atmosphere bring home the horror of war and underline its blasphemous nature. It's utterly contemporary.





Left: one of Braka's repeat reads. Below: his billiards room, with an Elizabethan cupboard that belonged to his mother

MY STYLE ICONS are King Charles, Bryan Ferry and Robin Birley. The King manages to have an endless variety of clothes for every occasion, and none of them are boring. He rings the changes while keeping a very individual style. Bryan Ferry, I don't think I need to elaborate. He epitomises cool. And Robin Birley's style is not merely sartorial, it is behavioural. As Iago says of Cassio in *Othello*: "He has an inner beauty in his life." I appreciate the level of Robin's good manners and courtesy.

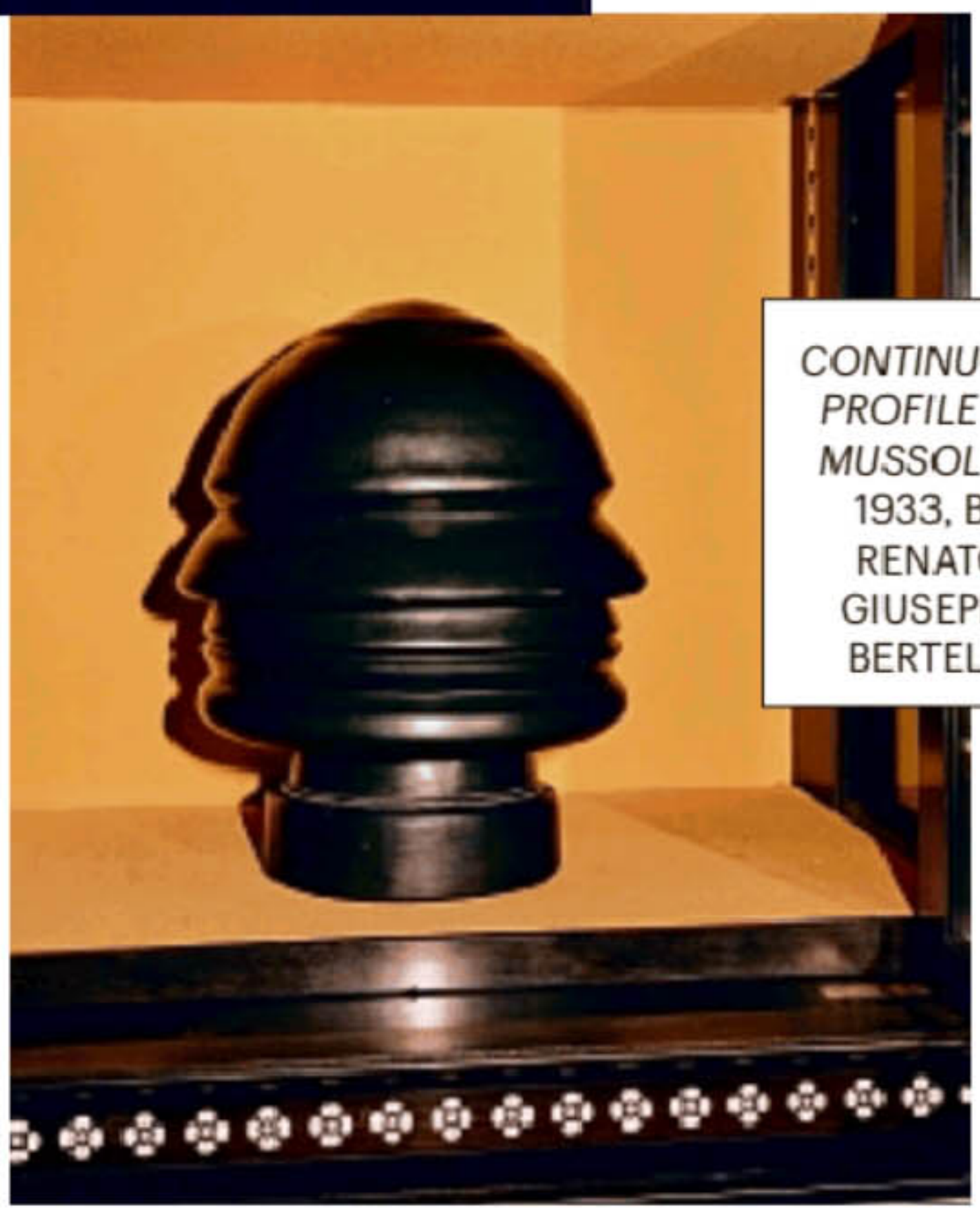
FAMILY FOR ME is my parents, as I don't have brothers or sisters. I have cousins but it's not the same thing. My grandmother was born in Damascus and came to Manchester on a boat via Marseille in 1919. When she arrived, she signed with a thumbprint as she couldn't write. Aged 13, she married Isaac Braka and had her first son, David, at 14. It's my girlfriend Liz and my friends who are my family. I've been married three times and am close to both my sons, Joseph [29] and Jack [20], but I only lived sporadically with them in a family unit. Last, but not least, Sami, the Saluki dog, is also family.

PARENTING IS AN AWESOME RESPONSIBILITY. It's innate rather than volitional. I'm not gushy; I prefer to keep things closest to me private. But my sons know exactly where

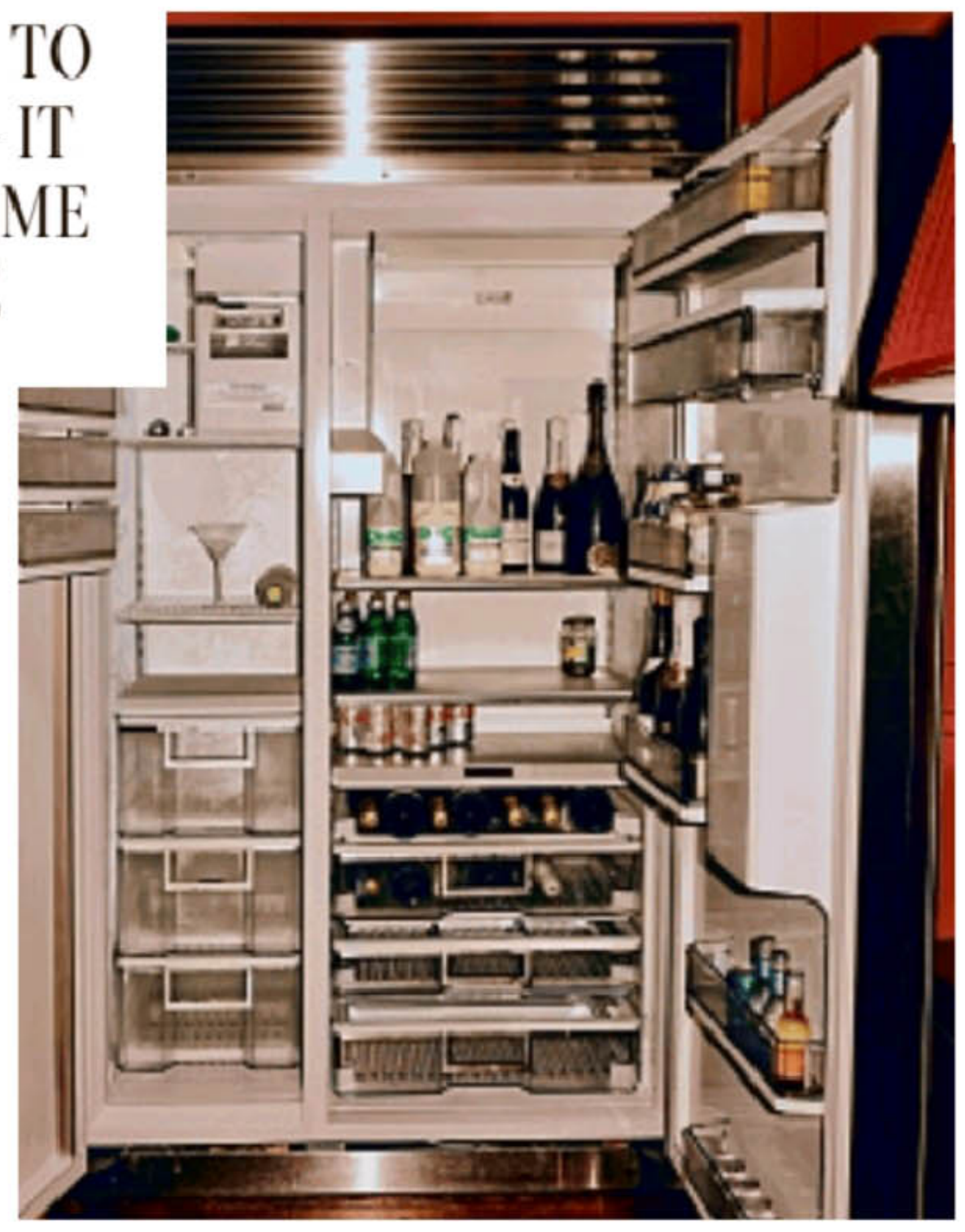
PHOTOGRAPH: DAMIEN HIRST AND SCIENCE LTD/ALL RIGHTS RESERVED, DACS

Right: Braka's bedroom. On the wall behind him (and below) is *Northleach Church*, 1948, by LS Lowry

I GAVE A BOAT TO JERRY HALL – IT WAS COSTING ME A FORTUNE



CONTINUOUS PROFILE OF MUSSOLINI, 1933, BY RENATO GIUSEPPE BERTELLI

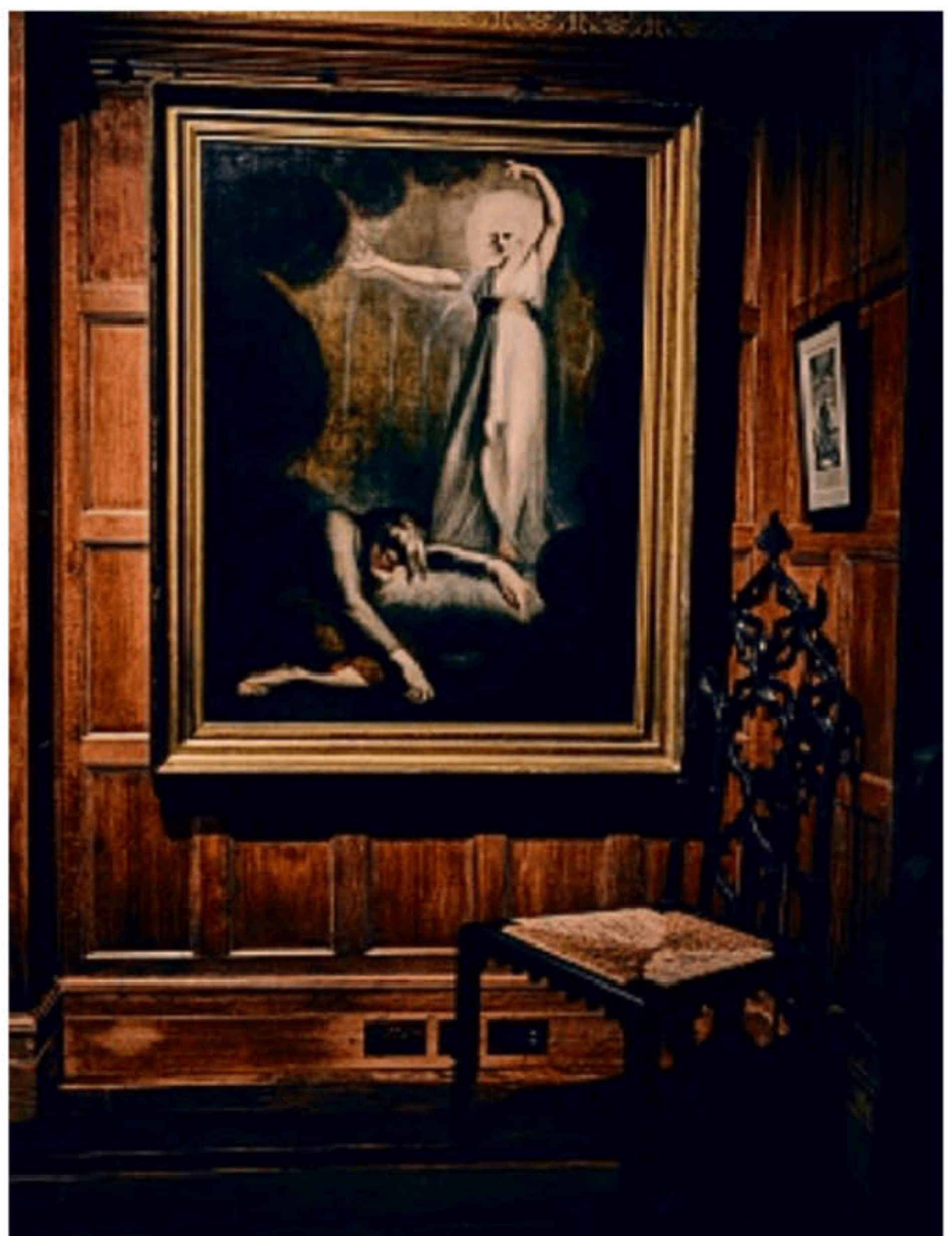


Above: inside his fridge. Below: Braka in the first-floor panelled room beside (on wall) *The Kiss*, 1900, by Joseph Granie and (on table) *My Webley*, 1999, by Clive Barker

ANOTHER OF HIS FRIDGE STAPLES

HELLMANN'S
REAL

Below: Henry Fuseli's *St John's Vision of the Seven Candlesticks*, 1796. Below left: one of Braka's leather waistcoats and his Dior boots in his dressing room



they stand with me. They are their own people. I don't try to live my life through them in any way. I'm not a helicopter parent.

THE ARTWORK THAT HAS BEEN IN MY FAMILY THE LONGEST is *Northleach Church*, an LS Lowry painting of a graveyard in the Cotswolds. We've had it since my father was a partner of Andras Kalman, founder of the Crane Kalman Gallery, in the 1950s. My father financed the gallery. As an only child, I was the recipient of his largesse. He made his money as a textile converter in Manchester, aka "Cottonopolis", profit centre for the British Empire. In Manchester terms, he was a very successful businessman. We disagreed about practically everything but we were close. He was a manic-depressive but also very amusing.

THE BEST GIFT I'VE GIVEN RECENTLY is a Hockney iPad drawing of spring to my son Joseph. I told him to sell it, as it's gone up from $20,000 to $350,000. The best gift I've ever given was my Apreamare, a nine-metre retro fishing boat, to Jerry Hall who, like me, has a house in the south of France. That may seem like an over-generous gesture but it wasn't; it was costing me a fortune every year in upkeep and I had just bought a new boat. I figured Jerry could handle the liability better than me.

AND THE BEST GIFT I'VE RECEIVED is my mother's happy nature. She enjoyed sunshine, rain, nature and animals, and had a positive attitude to life. Her name was Betty – Elizabeth Braka. I was very close to her. Also, despite being an atheist, she faced her death – at age 87 from a brain tumour – with complete equanimity.

THE BEST WAY TO SPEND £20 is at my pub, The Gunton Arms in Norfolk. Get the curry and chips and a couple of pints of local ale. The executive chef, Stuart Tattersall, uses the same curry recipe as the one served outside Old Trafford, Manchester United's football stadium. I also own the Suffield Arms opposite Gunton station. I bought them because they were in need of rescue and are near my country house in Norfolk, where I've just finished restoring Gunton Park, planting more than 500,000 trees. Rebuilding the community around Gunton has been a hugely important part of my life.

OWNING PUBS has reinforced my strong conviction that a pub – unlike a restaurant – is a place where you can interact with people from all walks of life. You can have a duchess meet a cowherd or a postman, and you can strike up random conversations from which you can then slide gracefully away. A pub provides a vital stage for social intercourse, which has been lost in an age of increasingly virtual contacts. Social media is anathema to me. In a pub you can stave off social isolation and loneliness, particularly in rural areas.

IN MY FRIDGE YOU'LL ALWAYS FIND white burgundy, chablis and Chassagne-Montrachet, a magnum of vintage Krug, Pol Roger white label, skimmed milk for me, semi-skimmed and full-fat milk for guests, Diet Coke, San Pellegrino, and Hellmann's mayonnaise. Plenty of alcohol and no food. I actually like cooking – things like pastas and roasts of various kinds – but I buy the food on the day I need it, otherwise I'd eat it all. And I'd like not to do that.

THE LAST THING I BOUGHT AND LOVED was *The Songs and Sonnets of John Donne*, which I find inspirational – I love the combination of emotion and acute thinking. Poetry is missing in life today, so it's an important thing to focus on.

AN INDULGENCE I WOULD NEVER FORGO is my weekly Sunday-night dinner with my fellow art dealer and friend John Erle-Drax. We talk about family, what we've done at the weekend and about business. We've made a lot of deals over our dinners. I'll scribble down – on paper tablecloths if they have them – ideas John gives me about approaching clients. We go to Giovanni in Yeoman's Row, Olivo on Eccleston Street, and Cambio de Tercio, owned by my Spanish friend Abel Lusa.

I WOULD NEVER PART WITH my collection of four Walter Sickert paintings depicting poverty-stricken women. He had a real understanding of the human condition. I'm not saying they are technically as good as his hero Degas, but Degas' pictures of ballerinas and sex workers washing don't have Sickert's immediacy or pathos. He advocated for art that "sticks to the kitchen" rather than the refinement of the drawing room. It's the opposite of Sargent.

THE GROOMING STAPLE I'M NEVER WITHOUT is John Frieda's Frizz Ease Serum. I don't like curly hair. I take care of my hair myself as it's fragile; I give it an occasional cut with my kitchen scissors. I also have a personal trainer, Roland Feizo. He comes to the house or I train with him in the park. I also go to Stars Gym in Battersea twice a week, where a lot of boxers and bouncers go. *John Frieda Frizz Ease All-in-1 Lightweight Serum, £7.99, sephora.co.uk*

THE WORKS OF ART THAT CHANGED EVERYTHING FOR ME were part of the Edvard Munch exhibition at the Hayward Gallery in 1973. It made me aware that art could render inner states of mind as well as landscapes or other things. Munch has a wonderful awareness of man's place and dislocation from the natural world and the universe. A dislocation even from himself. I'm not just thinking about *The Scream*, but also *Two Human Beings (The Lonely Ones)*, standing side by side on a shoreline.

SOME OF MY BEST IDEAS have come from drinking a gin and tonic while listening to "Nights in White Satin" by The Moody Blues. I discovered this combination as a young art dealer. When I had a client coming, I'd play it three or four times to reach a positive frame of mind. I felt I could sell almost anything if I'd done that.

HIS GROOMING ESSENTIAL

THE BEST BIT OF ADVICE I EVER RECEIVED is by Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde's tutor at Oxford. In his conclusion to *The Renaissance*, he wrote that "to burn always with this hard, gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life". That is my motto: to live in the present, to live every moment. ■**HTSI**

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INTERIORS

A COMMON THREAD

In Totnes, Nancy Nicholson is weaving together an extraordinary artistic heritage. By *Aimee Farrell*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **JENNA FOXTON**

Nancy Nicholson and her daughter, Odette, in the kitchen of her home in Totnes, under *Figs for Patroclus*, 2022, by Ophelia Appleby, and (above fireplace) *Mas de Fourques* by Winifred Nicholson

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MEMBER OF ALL ACCOR

Left: *Begonia* cushion cover, 1950, by Nancy Nicholson Sr

NANCY NICHOLSON SR, c1917

Right: *Fonda Marina*, 1953, by Winifred Nicholson, hangs above *Big Blue Rug*, 2024, by Nancy Nicholson in the living room. Below: Nicholson at the loom

Growing up in the wilds of Cumbria, textile artist Nancy Nicholson shared her family farmhouse with a menagerie of animals; her mother is a farmer, and her father the agricultural economist Kit Nicholson.

"There were sheep and pigs in the kitchen, and baby lambs under the bed," Nicholson recalls. The experience is intrinsic to her creative practice; her precise and refined woven designs are often worked in heritage Cumbrian wool and reflect the earthy palette of her childhood terrain. "My colours have a weathered warmth that comes out of those wind-lashed hillsides," she says.

In the summer of 2022, however, she and her husband – chef and St John alumnus Tim Blanchard – moved to Totnes in Devon. Fittingly, they fell for a former wool merchant's house. Uphill from the River Dart, at the top of town, the building dates back to the 1830s and has cycled through different purposes; for some time in the 1900s it was a pub. Peeling back fitted carpets and layers of plasterboard, the couple discovered past lives etched into the wattle and daub. In the hallway a small box frame holds the Georgian treasures they and past owners have found, some beneath the floorboards: a penny, a bottle top, a hairpin and a trumpet-shaped brooch.

Nicholson's patriarchal lineage infuses every corner of the house. She is the great-granddaughter of the modernist British painter Ben Nicholson and is named after his sister: her great-great-aunt, Nancy Nicholson, a talented textile artist, designer and creative tour de force in her own right. In the sitting room, one of Nancy senior's playful cushions is printed with the silhouette of a duck on one side and an egg on the other. The bird was also the logo of Poulk Press, the studio and showroom that Nancy opened on London's Motcomb Street, selling block-printed and stencilled fabric and stationery to the likes of Jackie Kennedy and the Shah of Persia.

"NANCY HAS ALWAYS BEEN THERE, A SILENT PRESENCE IN MY LIFE"

"Nancy has always been there, a silent presence in my life," says Nicholson of her namesake. "I knew more about her personality than her work. I always knew she was cool." Nancy pronounced herself a suffragist at age eight, produced a cover illustration for *Vogue* at 14 and joined the Land Army at 17. Best known as the feminist wife of poet Robert Graves, she also lived in Cairo, on a barge near Hammersmith Bridge, and built her own Baltic pine house in Wiltshire with another poet, Geoffrey Taylor. She smoked, enjoyed clothes and was, apparently, a terrible cook.

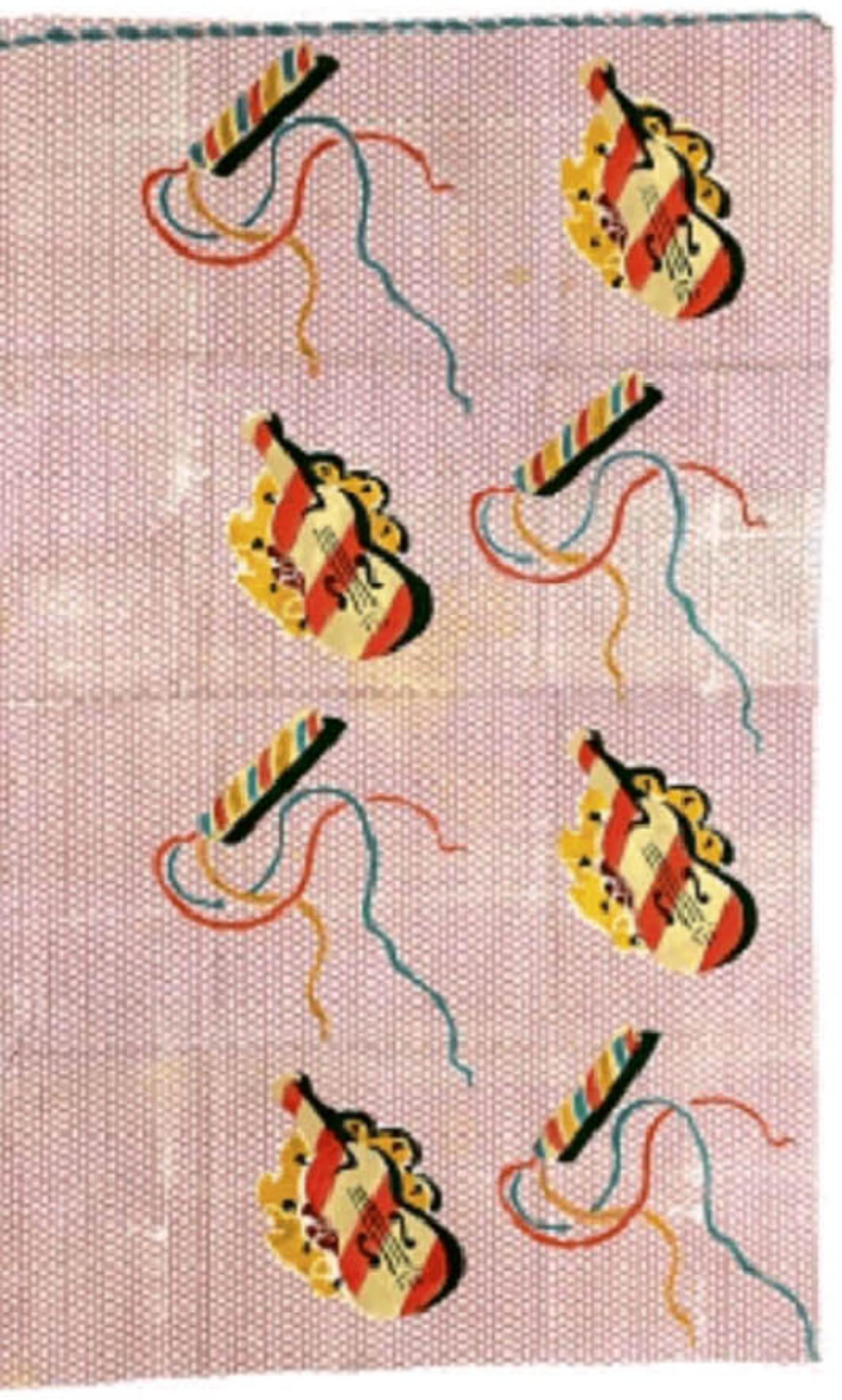
A NEW EXHIBITION will shed more light on the family's creative output. *Relative Ties*, which opens on 6 March at The Women's Art Collection at Murray Edwards College in Cambridge, will bring together the work of three generations of Nicholson women: Nancy senior, her mother Mabel, her sister-in-law EQ Nicholson, and EQ's daughter Louisa Creed.

"Nancy was quite a renegade," says director of The Women's Art Collection Harriet Loffler. "She was resourceful and uncompromising. I wanted to pull her out of the shadows." The show will address

THE BIG RED TRIANGLE RUG, DESIGNED FOR CHRISTOPHER FARR BY NANCY NICHOLSON, FROM £1,200

Left: Black Goose sofa cushion cover, 1938, by Nancy senior's sister-in-law EQ Nicholson. Below: the family in 1918

PENNY FIDDLE FABRIC, c1926, BY NANCY NICHOLSON SR



"EVERYTHING IS EITHER INHERITED OR MADE BY ONE OF US"

Nancy's unsung role in bringing her brother Ben's textiles to life, as well as her collaborations with his second wife, Barbara Hepworth.

In Nicholson's bedroom in Totnes, one of the graphic Ben Nicholson fabrics, likely printed by Nancy senior, is now preserved under glass. Her great-grandfather's paint chest lives upstairs beneath one of her own woven textile works; other walls are hung with works by EQ and Winifred Nicholson, Ben's first wife. "Their stuff is everywhere," she says. "Nancy's cushions were all over my childhood home; Ben's curtains hung at the windows. They all produced these tangible objects that have always been part of our everyday lives. Everything here now is either inherited or has been made by one of us."

Up in the attic bedroom, the twin beds tell the story of another great-grandfather, the architect and builder Cooper Pattinson. A framed pair of handpainted linen trousers, meanwhile, was designed by Russian artist Nicholas Roerich for Sergei Diaghilev's 1914 ballet production of *Prince Igor*.

Nicholson became interested in weaving while working as a freelance set designer for the likes of the Royal Opera House and Royal Albert Hall. When she was charged with recreating a loom as a prop for a play, her fascination spiralled into an obsession. "I realised what an amazing piece of kit a loom is," says Nicholson. "I'd never thought about textiles until then, even though I'd grown up surrounded by them."

TODAY, HER STUDIO is above the Church House Inn, a 13th-century pub in the nearby village of Harberton, now run by her husband. She works largely on private commissions. For design studio Todhunter Earle, for example, she spent six months weaving a 4sq m rug in verdant, ivy-dyed yarn. It is now housed in an award-winning residence in Wiltshire.

A more recent work was displayed earlier this month at the General Assembly Gallery in Mayfair as part of the paint producer Atelier Ellis's inaugural Makers programme. Its palette is inspired by a Winifred Nicholson painting of a Cumbrian escarpment known as Northrigg Hill. "It has always evoked a feeling of comfort and safety for me," says Nicholson of the piece. When she was young it hung above her parents' bed and she remembers climbing in to gaze at its evocative brushwork. Now it hangs in her Totnes bedroom. "I can see it from my bed," she adds. "And so can my baby daughter." ■**HTSI**

Relative Ties runs from 6 March to 6 September at The Women's Art Collection at Murray Edwards College, Cambridge

Above: a tapestry by Nicholson in her studio, beside photographs by Ellen Christina Hancock

A HOOKY RUG BY WINIFRED NICHOLSON, c1968, ON THE LANDING

RUSH MATTERS coaster, £8

DRAGON DIFFUSION woven leather Nova Luna shoulder bag, £330, net-a-porter.com

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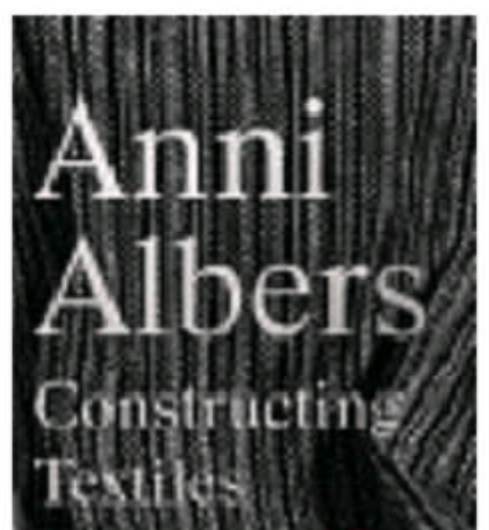
BOTTEGA VENETA leather Cat charm, £470

L'ATELIER 73 gold mesh bracelet, £250

Anni Albers: Constructing Textiles, published 10 March by Yale University Press, £40



ANDREW MARTIN linen-mix Indus Brick cushion, £95

STAUD woven leather Brigitte mules, £360, net-a-porter.com

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Photographed by Tina Barney

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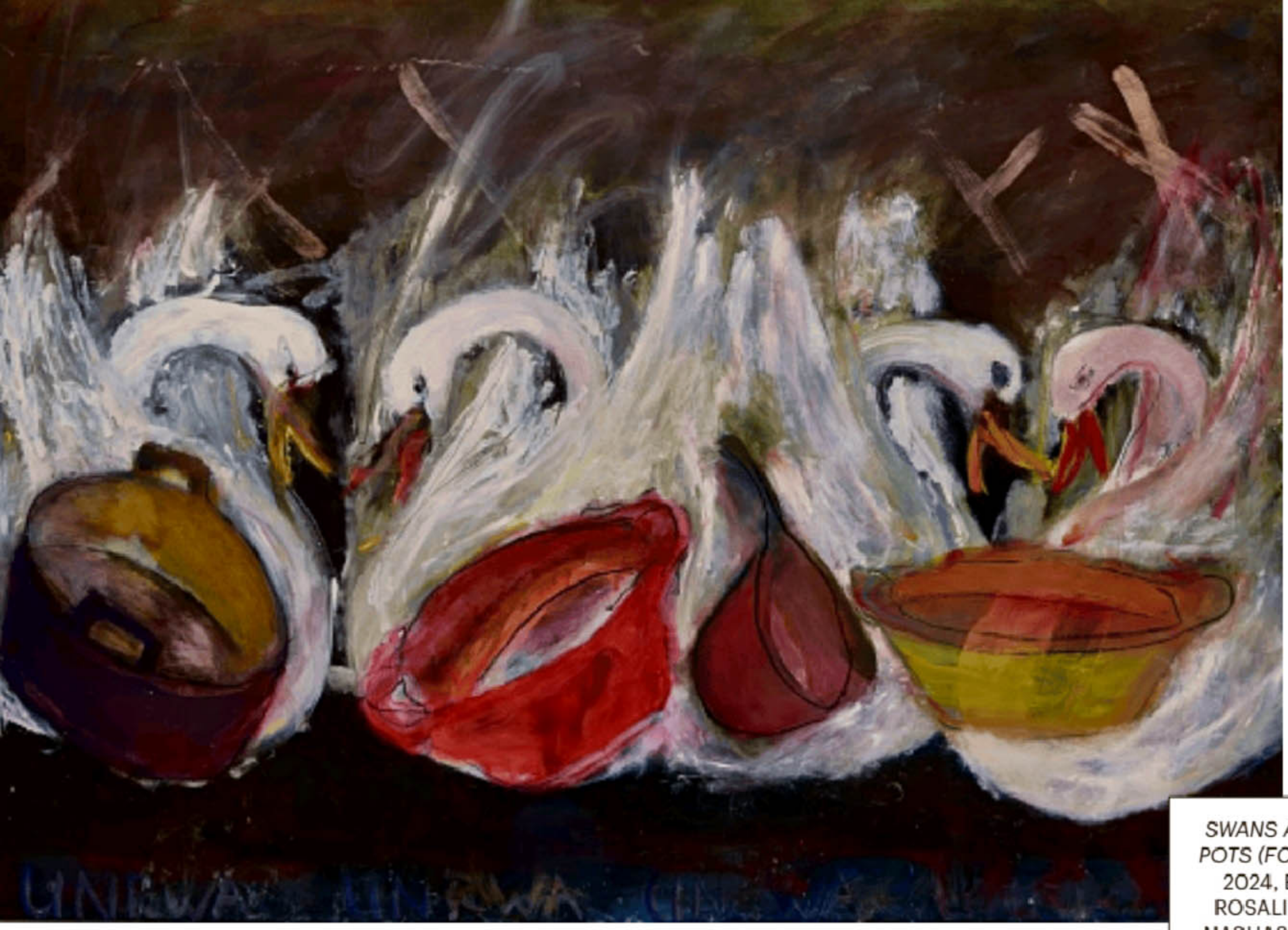


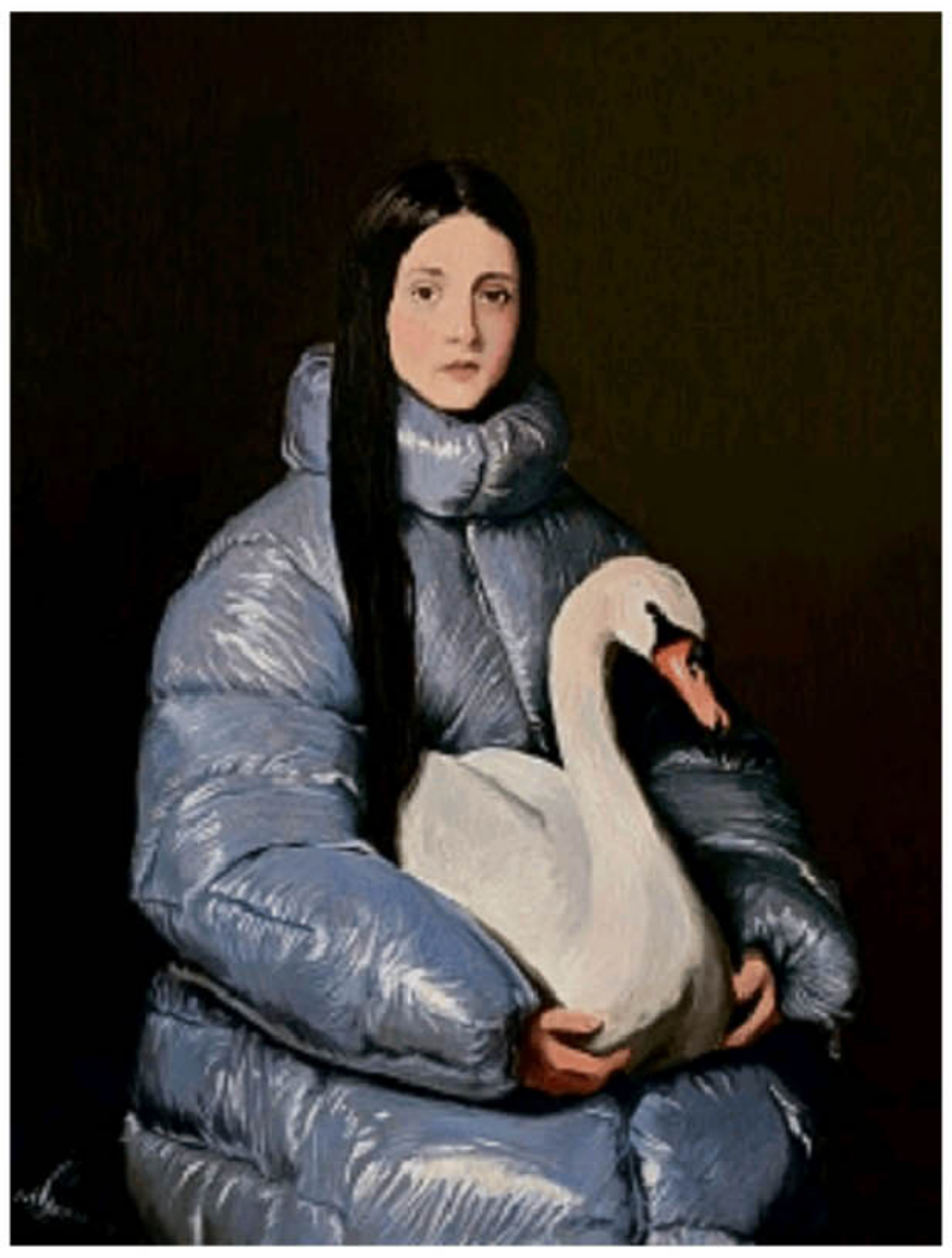
SWANS AND POTS (FOUR), 2024, BY ROSALIND NASHASHIBI

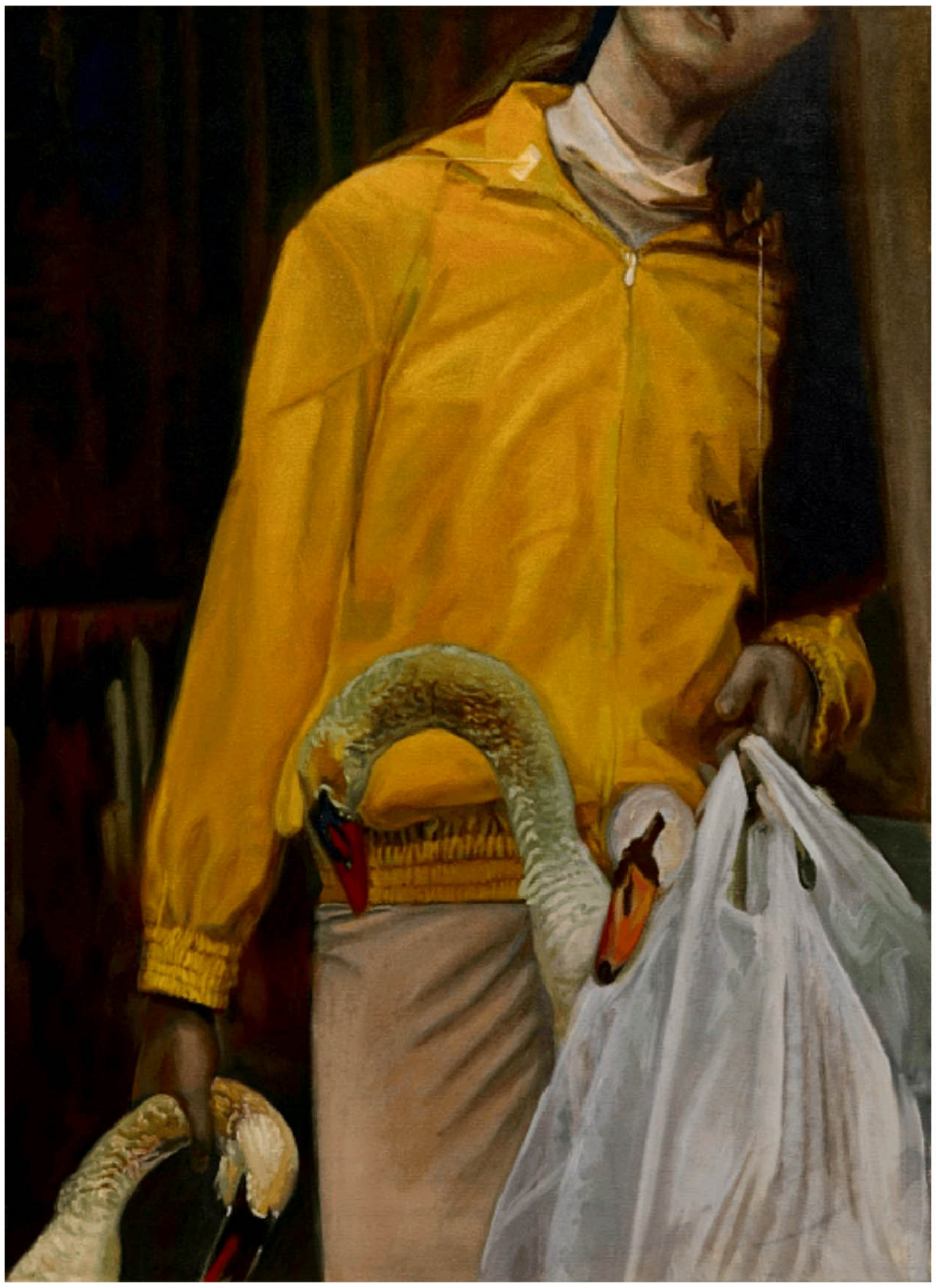
VISUAL ARTS

FOLLOW THE LEDA

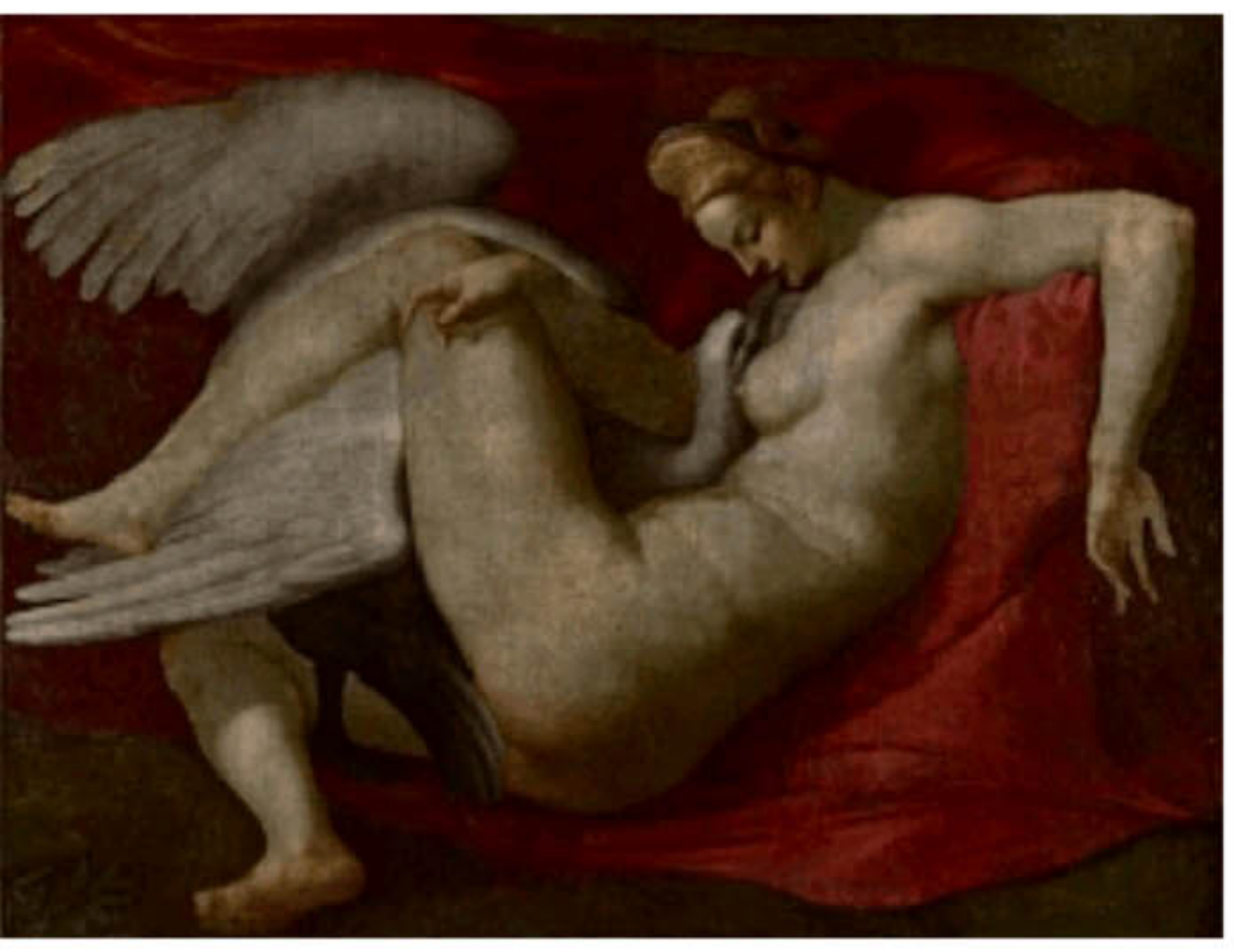
The swan has fascinated artists since antiquity. It's a complex allure, says *Simon Chilvers*

LA SANTA Y EL CISNE, 2025, BY NIEVES GONZÁLEZ





Top right: *Girl with Swans*, 2019, by Shannon Cartier Lucy. Below: *Leda and the Swan*, c1530, by Michelangelo



PHOTOGRAPHS: ALBIN DAHLSTRÖM/MODERNA MUSEET. BRIDGEMAN IMAGES. JONATHAN DE WAART/ COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND GRIMM. NIEVES GONZÁLEZ. SHANNON CARTIER LUCY

In 2025, the artist Nieves González, recently commissioned to paint the portrait of Lily Allen for her *West End Girl* album cover, also produced the painting *La Santa y el cisne*. Featuring a near-expressionless female figure in a puffer coat with a perfect white swan sitting in her lap, it makes you do a double take.

"I am particularly interested in the duality of the swan," says González. "It is an animal associated with beauty, purity and elegance – but at the same time it carries something unsettling, even aggressive, that disrupts that idealised image."

Swans, associated with Aphrodite, Venus and Apollo, have long been a source of mythic fascination; during the Greek Archaic period they were considered a symbol of good health, music, divination and grace. They have inspired artists for millennia, from the Greek myth of Leda and the swan and its depictions by Leonardo, Cézanne or Boucher, to Hilma af Klint, whose portrayals, from figurative to abstract, will feature in an exhibition opening at the Grand Palais in Paris this spring (6 May until 30 August). Shannon Cartier Lucy's 2019 oil *Girl with Swans* features a woman carrying a plastic bag of swans, which she likes painting for their "loaded symbolism". Her solo show *Bucket of Birds* will open in April at Night Gallery in LA.

"The beauty of the swan is widely acknowledged," says designer Sabina Savage, who has used the motif in her latest scarf collection Fairytale di Firenze. "But my real fascination with them comes from the darker side of their nature. Just as their pearlescent white feathers gleam above the water, the swelling depths conceal black, gnarled legs and cumbrous feet." For British-Palestinian artist Rosalind Nashashibi, meanwhile, the birds in her paintings teeter between "peaceful and warlike, beautiful and kitsch". She likes to use them as signifiers for her complex political feelings.

Swans have long featured in luxury and high culture. Until the 18th century they were a gourmet delicacy: it's reported that in 1247, King Henry III ordered 40 swans for Christmas dinner. Swan decorations adorned Marie Antoinette's bathroom at Versailles, and the queen favoured accessories featuring swan feathers (you can see further examples in *Marie Antoinette Style* at the V&A, until 22 March). Fashion still loves swans. At his debut womenswear collection for Dior, Jonathan Anderson presented a skirt of swan-like plumes; the skirt was later worn by the actor Natalie Portman to a special screening of Darren Aronofsky's film *Black Swan* in 2025. When Meryll Rogge, the new creative director at Marni, co-launched her BB Wallace knitwear brand last year, she chose the swan as one of its key emblems.

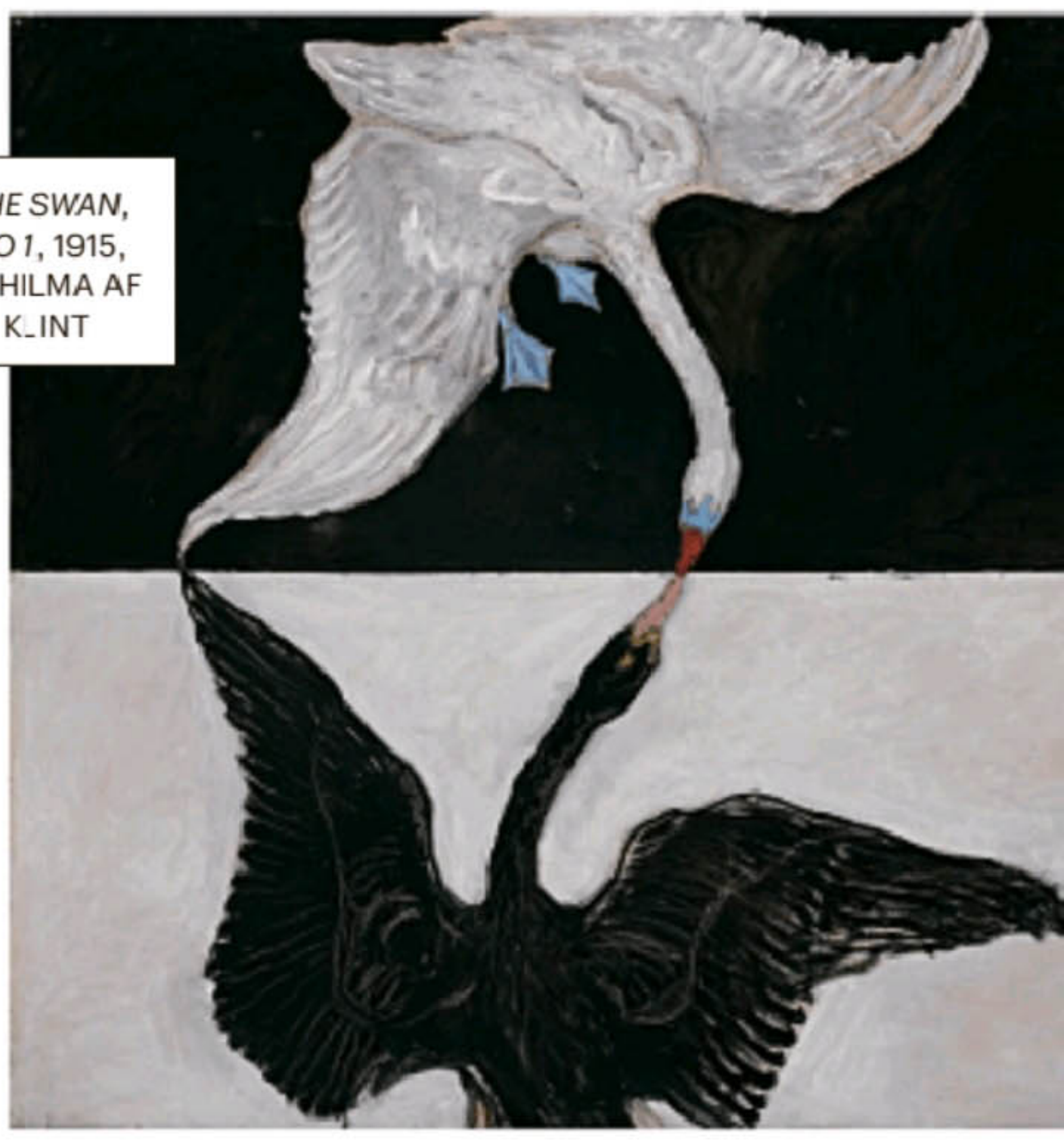
> **"A BLACK SWAN STILL LIVES SOMEWHERE INSIDE ME"**

Fashion illustrator and artist Mats Gustafson began making pastel drawings of swans in the early '90s. His images have featured in various exhibitions, including a 2023 show at Stockholm's Millesgården museum where 10 swans appeared on an elegant room screen – a piece of furniture that now resides in Toteme's Swedish flagship store. Later this year, Gustafson will present his latest versions in a solo exhibition at MA2 gallery in Tokyo. He traces his interest in the birds back to a winter in Stockholm, walking along the water by the Royal Palace.

"There is so much mythology around them," he says. "When I did the first swans there was maybe a touch of irony that I used something so overly considered as beautiful – but I am drawn to their graphic beauty."

"The swan is bound to the idea of love," says the artist Mamma Andersson. "The romantic, infatuated kind, where two swans glide so closely together that their necks form a heart, and the love that has been lost, where an abandoned swan moves through the water alone." For a long time, she avoided swans because "certain symbols are so saturated with cliché that one instinctively resists them". Then, in 2016, alongside artist Tal R, she created an exhibition titled *Svanesang* (Swan Song), which featured the likes of *Svanedamm* (Swan Pond) with five birds gliding on water together. She returned to the subject with *Swannery* in 2019. "A black swan still lives somewhere inside me," she says. "Sooner or later it will find its way into a painting. They say a black swan can change everything." ■**HTSI**

THE SWAN, NO 1, 1915, BY HILMA AF KLINT



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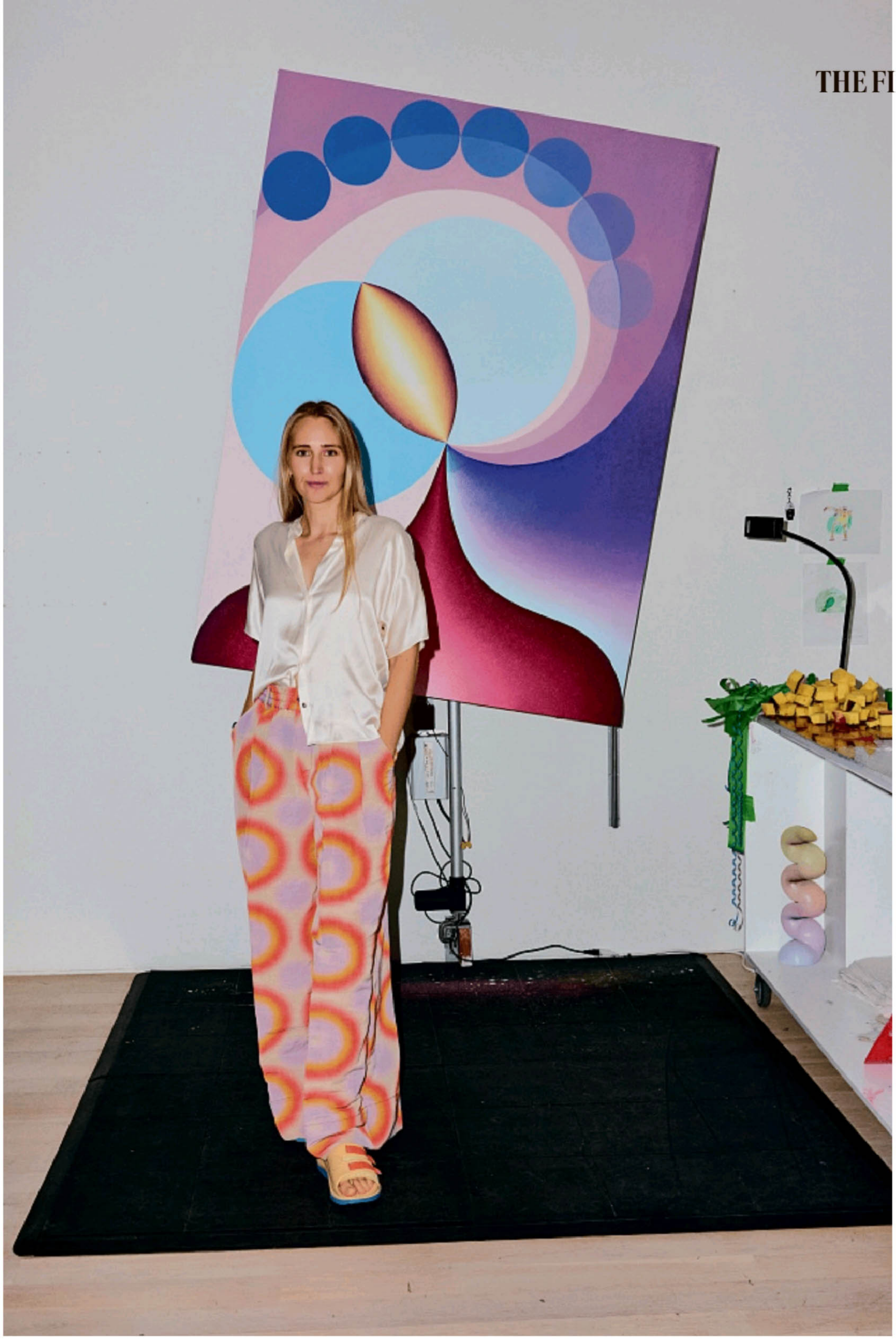
VISUAL ARTS

BODIES OF BLISS AND AWE

Artist Loie Hollowell turns pregnancy, birth and motherhood into "cosmic energy". Interview by *Victoria Woodcock*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **JEREMY LIEBMAN**



I want there to be more exhibits about mothering," says Loie Hollowell. An hour into our conversation, the New York-based painter is becoming more animated. We've got on to the subject of the artists whose work she's been drawn to, such as Swedish feminist Monica Sjöö and her controversial 1960s canvas *God Giving Birth*. "My dream is to create an exhibition of visceral birth images, blood everywhere," says Hollowell, a mother of two, laughing giddily. "I have proposed it in different ways. No one has taken me up on it yet. I'm kind of joking, but I'm not joking."

Hollowell's own paintings, being shown at Pace gallery in London next month, are more vibrational than visceral. She describes the work she started making more than a decade ago as "bodily abstractions about my sexuality". They've since evolved to encompass her experiences of pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding in compositions that are both intensely precise in their graphic symmetry and playfully suggestive in their placement of organic forms. Wrought in a spectrum of kaleidoscopic colours, they appear to exude a kind of cosmic energy.

It's a heady combination that has swiftly propelled the 43-year-old to art star status. She has been represented by Pace since 2019; her work has been acquired by institutions including the Centre Pompidou in Paris and the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington DC; and several pieces have attracted auction sales in seven figures – her *Standing in Red* sold for $2.29mn at Sotheby's Hong Kong in 2023.

"When I first saw her work, I just flipped out," recalls Pace CEO Marc Glimcher. "I walked into her studio and it was like [seeing] the reincarnation of Hilma af Klint or Georgia O'Keeffe, combined with a sensibility that resonates with Robert Irwin. She just knows how to switch on these systems of bliss and awe."

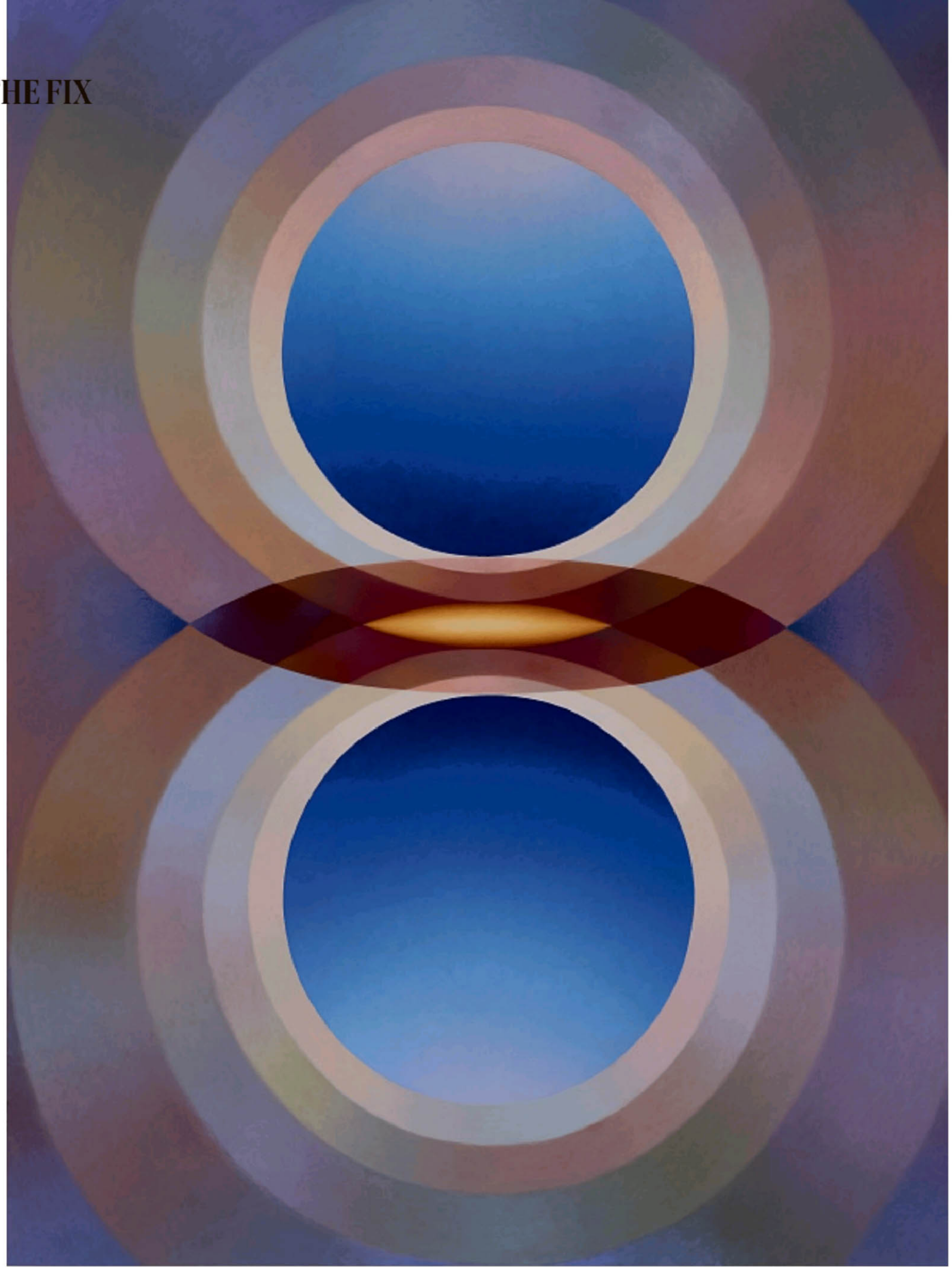
At her Brooklyn studio, a brightly patterned head scarf pulling back her dark blonde hair, Hollowell is putting the final touches to works that will be the focus of the London show. The process is painstaking, blending colour gradients with tiny brushes. "These paintings very much started with the birth of my children [Lyndon, seven, and Juniper, five] and have ended in me really trying to find a phenomenological light experience for the viewer," she explains.

The series is centred on mirrored oval forms, one concave, one convex, protruding out from and sunken into the canvas. It was Hollowell's husband – fellow artist Brian Caverly – who first came up with the configuration. "Then after I had Lyndon, I realised that it really spoke to that experience of being pregnant and then being empty," she says. "If the piece was folded in half it would perfectly fit into itself, like mother and child."

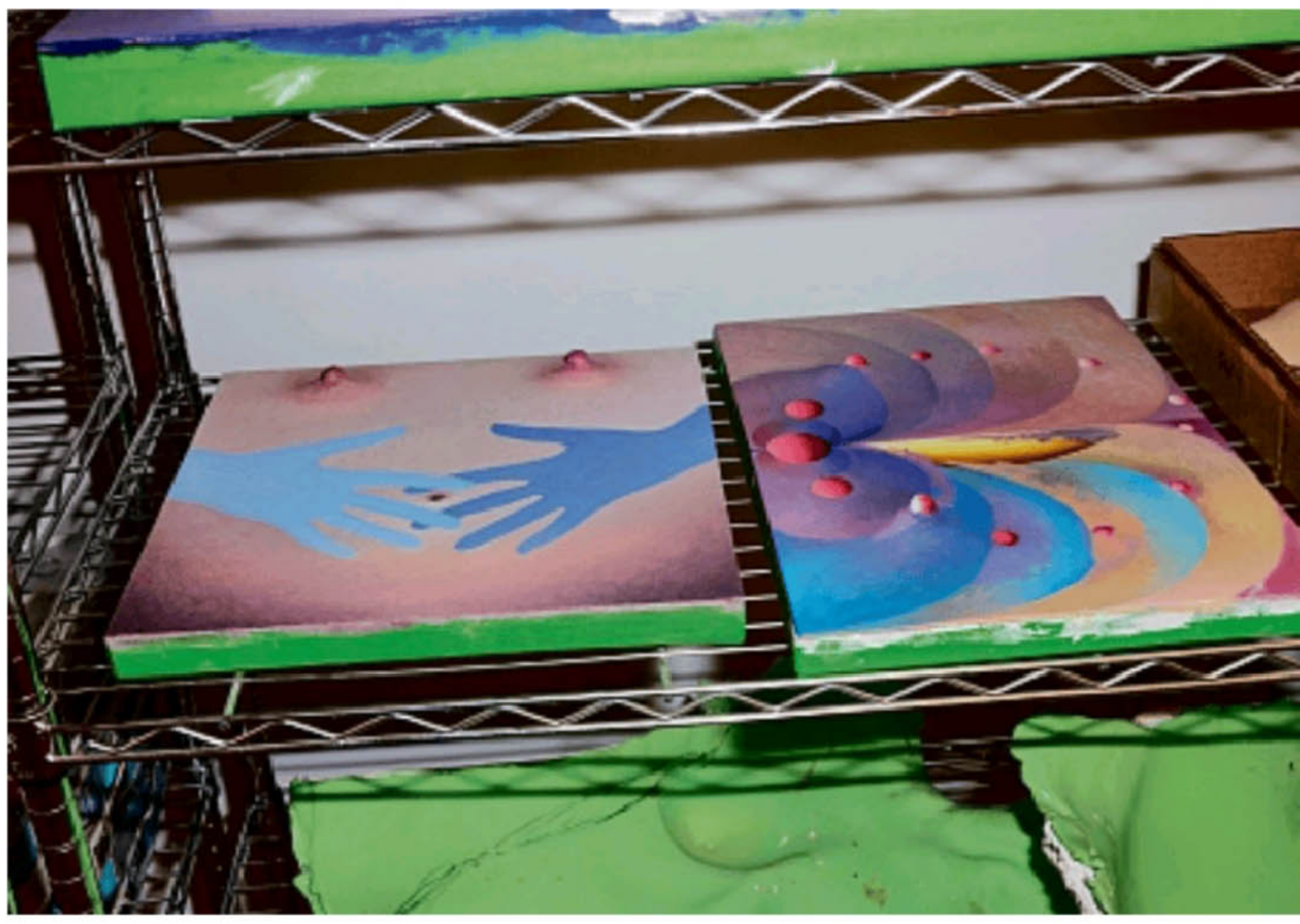
"MY DREAM IS TO CREATE AN EXHIBITION OF VISCERAL BIRTH IMAGES"

Hollowell was in her third trimester with Lyndon when she began to experiment with sculptural elements. "Getting pregnant threw off my practice in a destabilising way,"

Above: a body cast of a friend in their third trimester alongside artwork by Loie Hollowell's children in her Brooklyn studio. Top right: the artist in front of *Mother's Milk in mauve, red, yellow and blue*, 2025. Right: nipple casts in various materials

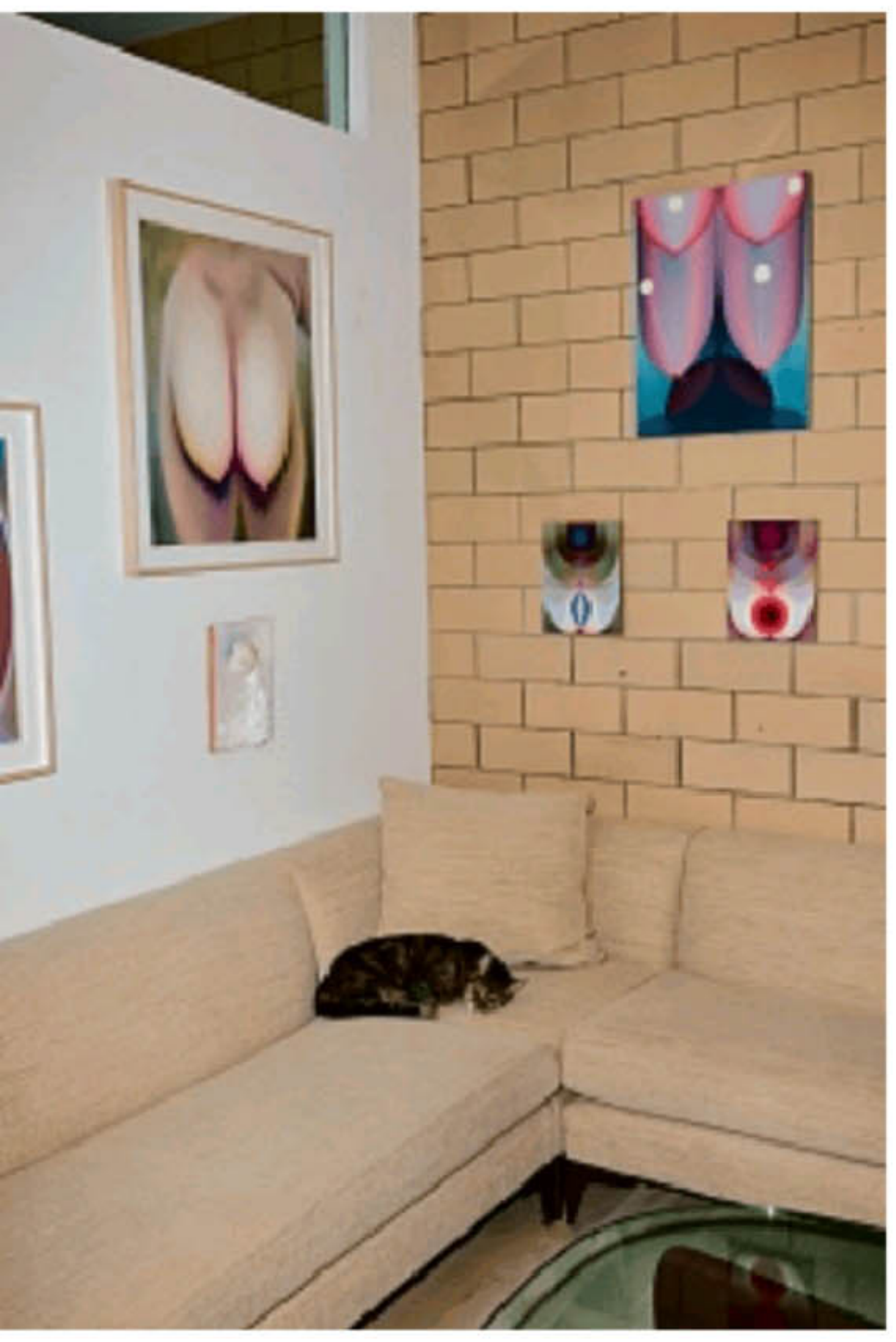


OVERVIEW EFFECT IN BLUE WITH SMALL YELLOW MANDORLA, 2025



UNTITLED WORKS IN PROGRESS

Below, clockwise from top left: *Luncheon on the Grass*, 2022; *Untitled*; *Dripping, drooping #2*, 2025; *Dripping, drooping #1*, 2025; *Untitled*



she says. "The physical change sent everything into chaos. I realised my work had to change." She started taking casts of her body, and then of her pregnant friends' bodies – "their breasts, their nipples, their bellies" – and incorporating them into her canvases.

Two of Hollowell's favourite belly-cast paintings were shown last year in a group exhibition titled *Good Mom/Bad Mom* at Centraal Museum in Utrecht. "It was full of amazing images of motherhood and parenting," she says. "It's just not the kind of art I was exposed to growing up."

Not to say that Hollowell's childhood was especially conventional. She was raised in northern California, surrounded by a predominantly "hippie aesthetic: lots of Grateful Dead posters and psychedelic imagery". She was named Loie after her grandma, Lois, but also in a nod to an American pioneer of modern dance. "Loie Fuller invented this burlesque kind of performance, swirling big silk fabrics and incorporating lights," says Hollowell of her namesake. "She was painted by Toulouse Lautrec. Rodin was obsessed with her."

Both of Hollowell's parents are artists. She describes her dad as "a pointillist painter; a master realist. When I was young, he painted images of my mom and us in very composed, constructed rooms." Her mother, meanwhile, is "an all-around creative person. She did cartoons for the local newspaper. She sewed a lot." This, and her mother's general "psychedelic-ness", inspired her own creative path. At art school, Hollowell made "big sculptural fabric things" until she came to the conclusion "that painting was the most clear way to describe my feminist vision".

HER NEW YORK STUDIO is white-walled and workmanlike. Shelves are filled with row upon row of plaster casts. Slick steel sets of drawers open to reveal a sweet-shop-like selection of pastels, which she uses to create works on paper. The London show will feature pieces from the past 10 years.

"We had a pastel show [in New York] two years ago, and we had to kick people out almost every day," says Glimcher of *Dilation Stage*, a presentation of 10 drawings depicting Hollowell's pregnant belly. "The most remarkable thing about a Loie Hollowell show is that people sit and stay for a long time. I have a Loie from every period of Loie, and I spend time in front of them every single day."

For Hollowell, there are two distinct sides to her practice: the more abstract, "self-possessed" paintings, and then "this more didactic body work, like the cast bellies", she says. "I haven't figured out how they go together yet."

On the wall of her studio office she points out "a few little nipple experiments that I'm rotating", as well as some of her own drawings and studies, and pieces by friends. These include a small textural painting by Montreal-based Veronika Pausova – "those are nipples there, squirting out milk" – says Hollowell, before moving on to a delicate surreal drawing by Dutch artist Kinke Kooi and a mystical piece by the Chinese artist Shuling Guo.

"THOSE ARE NIPPLES THERE, SQUIRTING OUT MILK"

"It's a collection of all my favourite artists," says Hollowell, who also has a sizeable selection on display at her home, a small townhouse less than a mile from her studio that she refers to as "the nest". "I make colourful, minimal abstractions, but what I want to live with are these sweet, feminine, soft, expressive paintings." Her most treasured pieces are kept at the studio for daily inspiration – plus "I don't want the kids to destroy them", she smiles. Motherhood is a messy business, after all. ■**HTSI**

Loie Hollowell: Overview Effect is at Pace Gallery, London W1, from 4 March to 23 May

Below: Hollowell holds aqua-resin nipple casts

PHOTOGRAPH: © LOIE HOLLOWELL, COURTESY OF PACE GALLERY

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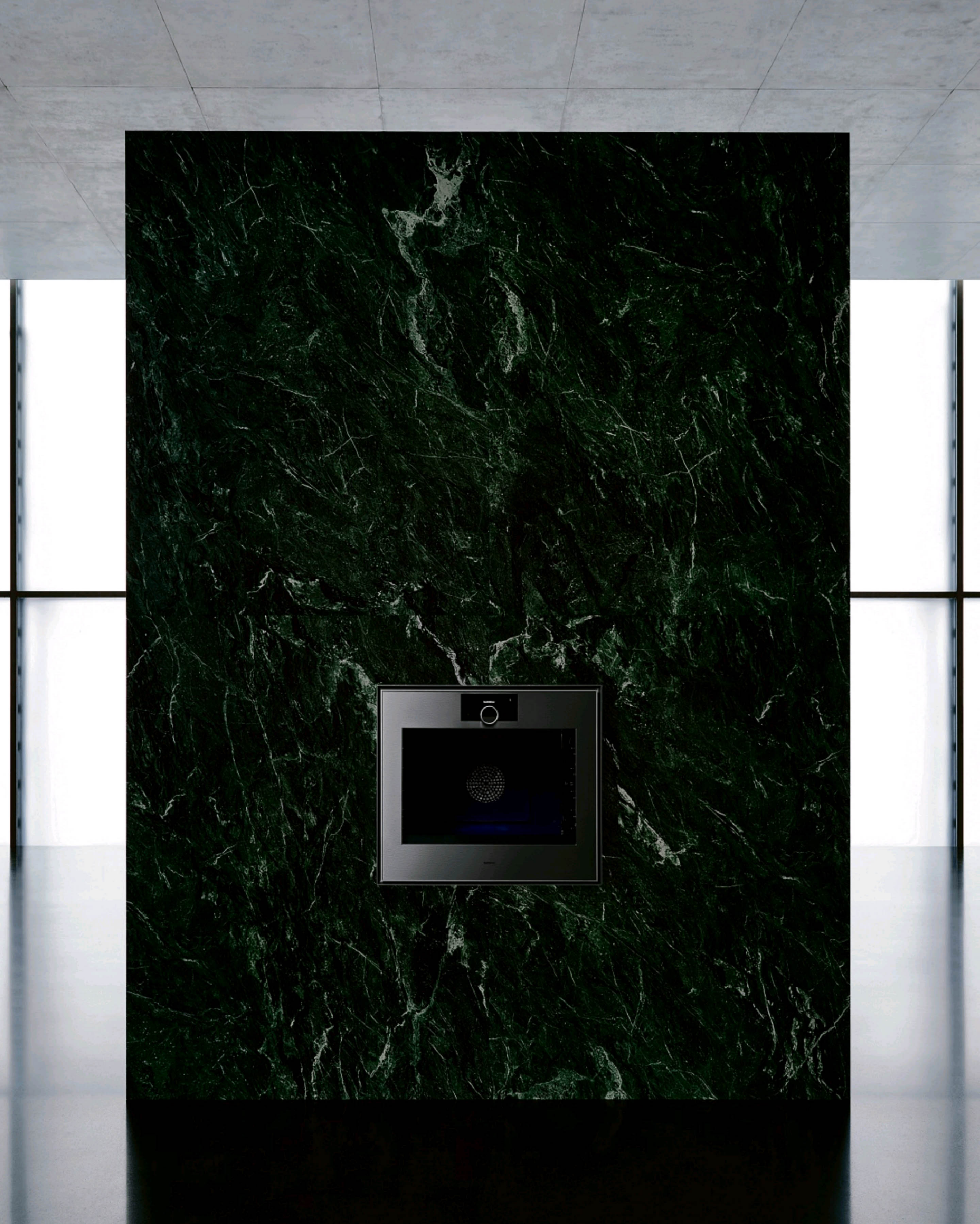

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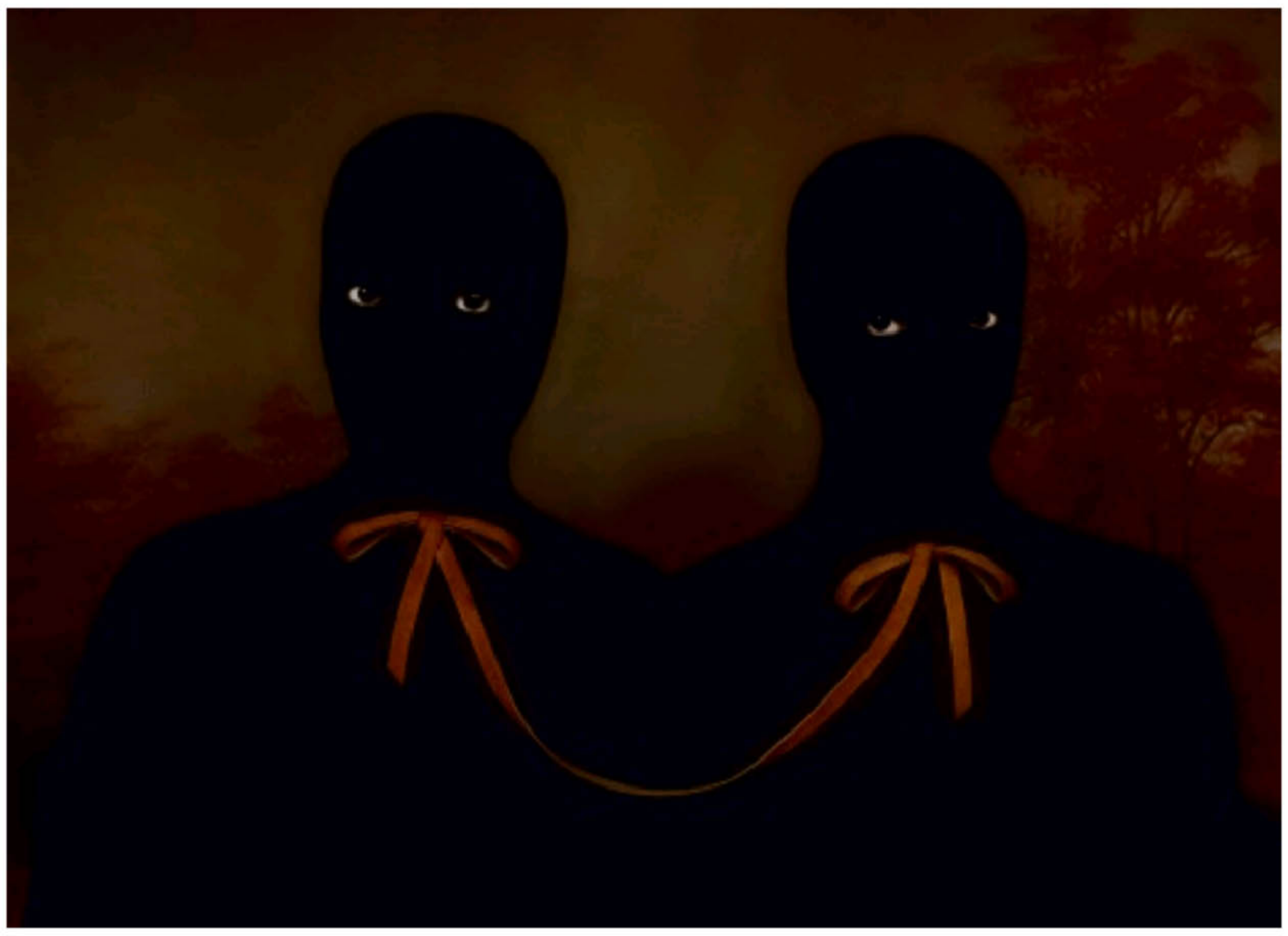


DOUBLE EXPOSURE

Identical twin photographers Elliot and Erick Jiménez find mystical inspiration in their Cuban heritage. By *Christian House*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **ELLIOT & ERICK JIMÉNEZ**

People always ask us if we're going to break up at some point," says Erick Jiménez of his twin brother, Elliot, and their creative partnership. The pair have worked together as photographers for some 20 years. Elliot responds: "He's stuck with me. He doesn't have a choice."

As identical twins and first-generation Cuban Americans, they have duality in their DNA. They were born in Florida but their artistic vision was shaped by their heritage. Their current solo show at the Pérez Art Museum Miami combines the evocative aesthetic of their commercial work – fashion editorial for the likes of *Vogue Thailand* and *Harper's Bazaar Italia* – with a mysticism mined from their family history.

Titled *El Monte (The Wilderness)*, the exhibition immerses viewers in the woozy world of Lucumí, a syncretic religion that emerged in Cuba during the late 19th century blending west African Yoruba beliefs with elements of Spanish Catholicism and a dash of spiritism. The twins give it their own spin: anonymous figures hold daggers and wear ruffs; some have rams' horns; a drowned Ophelia is covered in moths. The result is a kind of gothic Caribbean surrealism.

As well as photographs, the show includes chapel-like spaces, 17th-century furniture and a large womb-like ceiba tree installation. "Elliot and Erick's work builds a bridge between Miami's Caribbean communities, its religious and spiritual practices, and those of their ancestors," says the show's curator, Maritza Lacayo. "The gallery is transformed into something mysterious and whimsical."

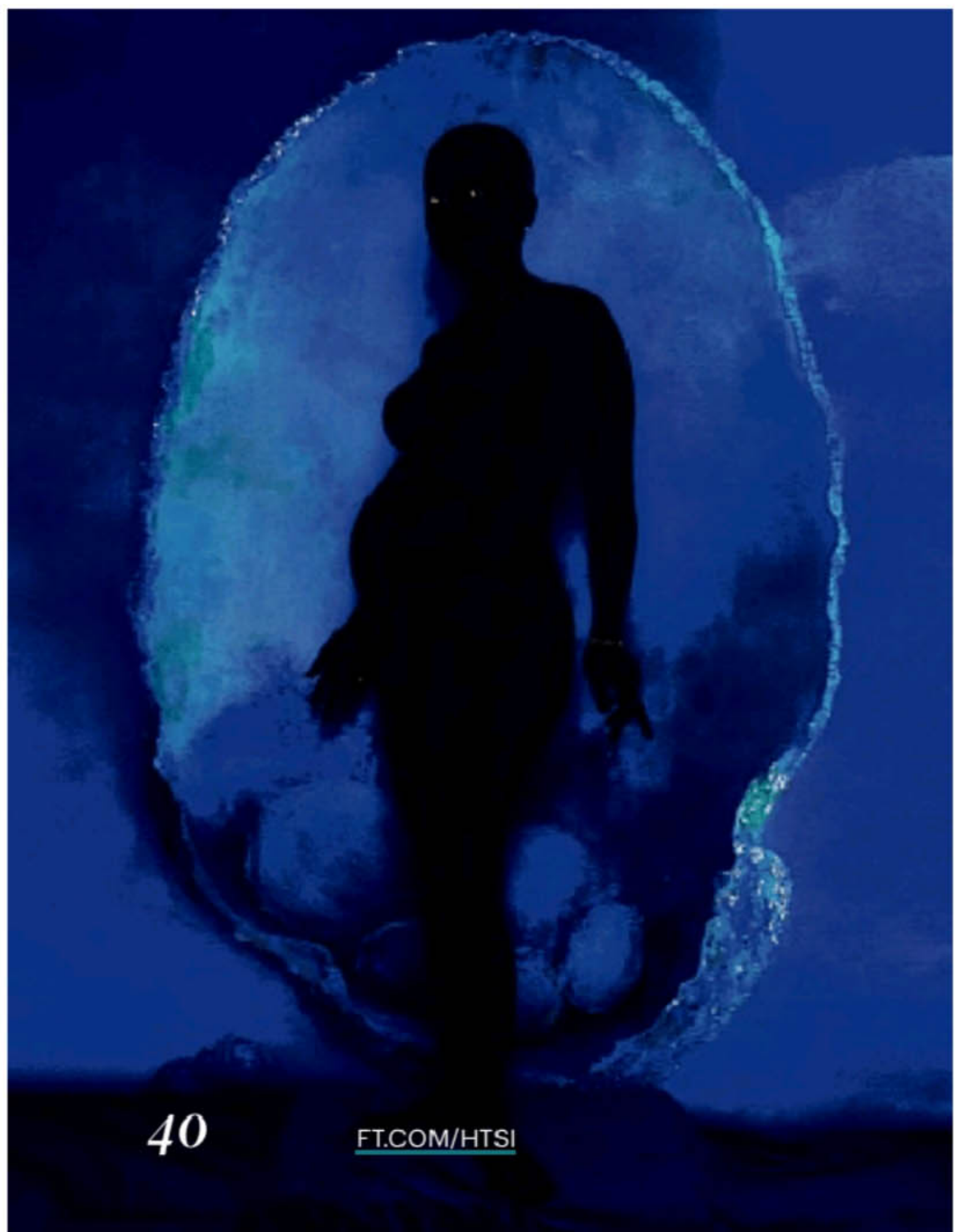
Like Lucumí, Elliot and Erick were born of exile. Their mother and father fled communist Cuba with their paternal grandparents in the 1980s, heading first for Costa Rica, then to the US. They eventually settled in Miami; after their parents divorced the twins were raised by their Afro-Cuban grandmother. "We grew up with a matriarch," says Erick. "She's always been the head of the household, the breadwinner, the one you go to when there's a problem."

Their grandmother worked as an aesthetician and the twins were immersed in the realm of manicures and facials. "We were exposed to the beauty industry when we were very young," says Elliot. He notes a link between the experience and how their careers focus on the nuances of appearance.

It was also through their grandmother that the brothers discovered Lucumí and its sacred stories (*patakis*), which link Yoruba gods and Catholic saints like the merging of characters from DC Comics and the Marvel universe. However, such theological amalgamation was a taboo subject during their childhood: "There was always a sense of, 'Don't speak about it outside the house'."

The duo started taking photographs as teenagers, individually to begin with and then together. "We enrolled in a black-and-white film photography class simply to fulfil an elective requirement at high school," recalls Elliot. "We assumed it would be an easy credit; instead, we fell in love."

Top: *El Monte (Ibeji)*, 2024. Top right: Erick (left) and Elliot Jiménez in their studio in Miami. Above, from left: *One to Bind*, 2025, and *The Incredulity of the Ibeyi*, 2025, on show at the Pérez Art Museum Miami. Below: *The Rebirth of Venus*, 2025



Their signature style of portraiture – bringing together moody colour and chiaroscuro with a love of staged compositions – has attracted significant attention. In 2023, they photographed Puerto Rican rapper Bad Bunny for the first Spanish-language cover of *Time* magazine; their hazily atmospheric image depicted Benito Antonio Martínez Ocasio with all the gravitas of a renaissance painting. That same year, their monumental billboard *Reclining Mermaid* – a representation of Yemaya, another Lucumí deity – took over a Miami street corner during the Art Basel fair.

Today they describe themselves as spiritual rather than religious; their work brings together "a lot of overlapping conversations, not just about our heritage but also how this connects to our own personal journey and stories", says Erick. "Growing up, we were always referred to as *ibejí*, which is the Yoruba name for twins. They have their own deity within the cosmology."

"All the projects we do, we have done together," says Erick. He refers to his brother as a "lifetime collaborator". Until 2021 they lived together in Miami. They also have a place in New York where they continue to cohabit.

"As identical twins, we share similar interests and friends, so we often spend time together outside of work," says Erick. "You'd think we'd get bored with each other but we're constantly surprising one another."

Their identical appearance is enhanced by an in-sync sense of style. Both sport a moustache on a bed of stubble (in subtly different ratios). "We only dressed the same when we were kids because our family dressed us that way," they say. Yet neither do their outfits differ wildly; "we'll occasionally overlap, the same jeans, a jacket," says Elliot. "Sharing pieces has always been a plus but we like having our own points of view."

> "GROWING UP, WE WERE REFERRED TO AS *IBEJÍ*, TWINS. THEY HAVE THEIR OWN DEITY"

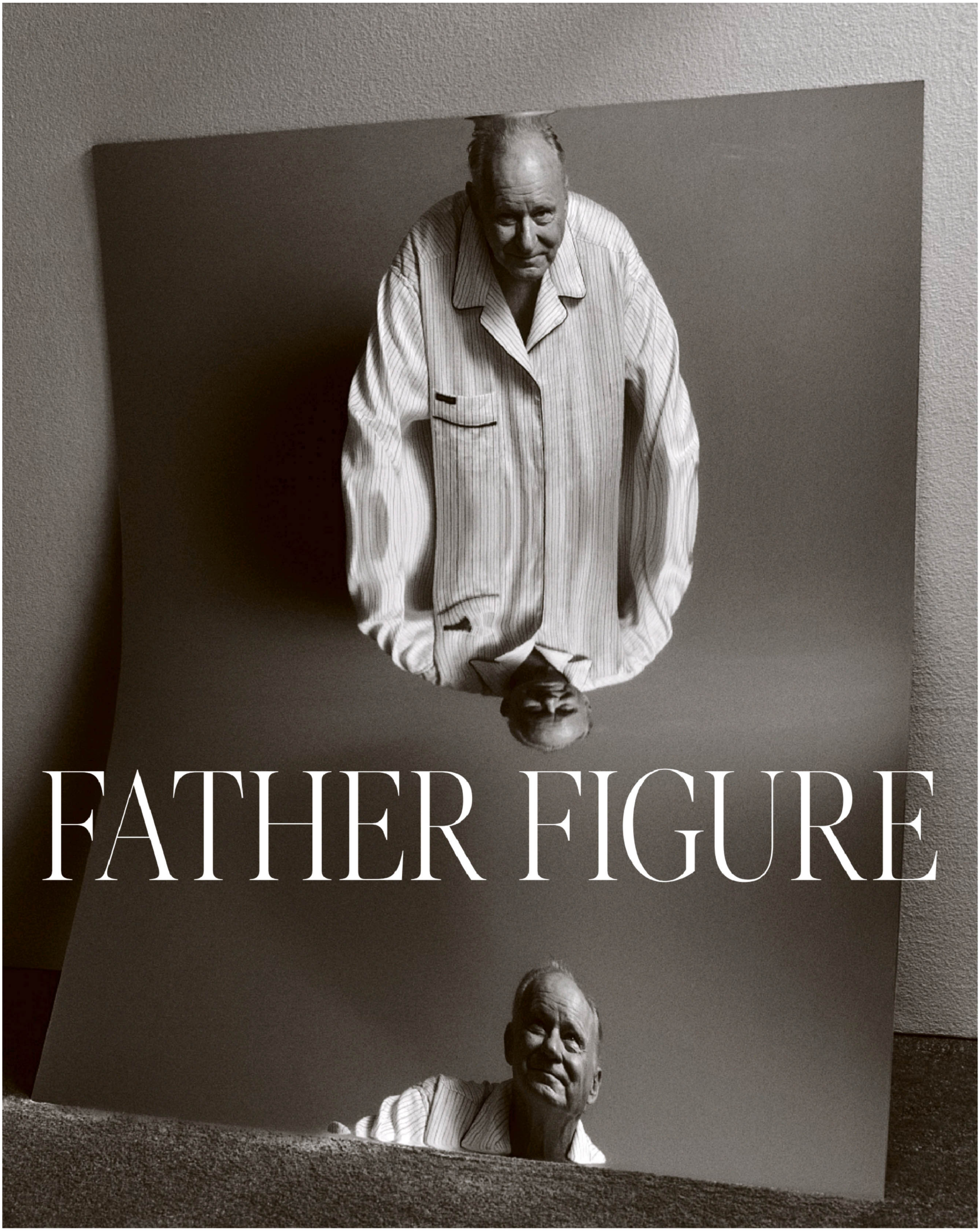
Elliot seems the more gregarious, Erick more contemplative. And they have their own individual strengths at work as well. "When it comes to the technical side of things, I'm usually the one that will take the lead," says Erick. "And then when it comes to editing and composition, Elliot will jump in."

Concepts for shoots are created collectively like filmmakers going through a process of pre-production. But do they always agree? "No!" laughs Elliot. "There's a lot of back and forth," adds Erick. "We will challenge each other. There's a lot of bickering at times."

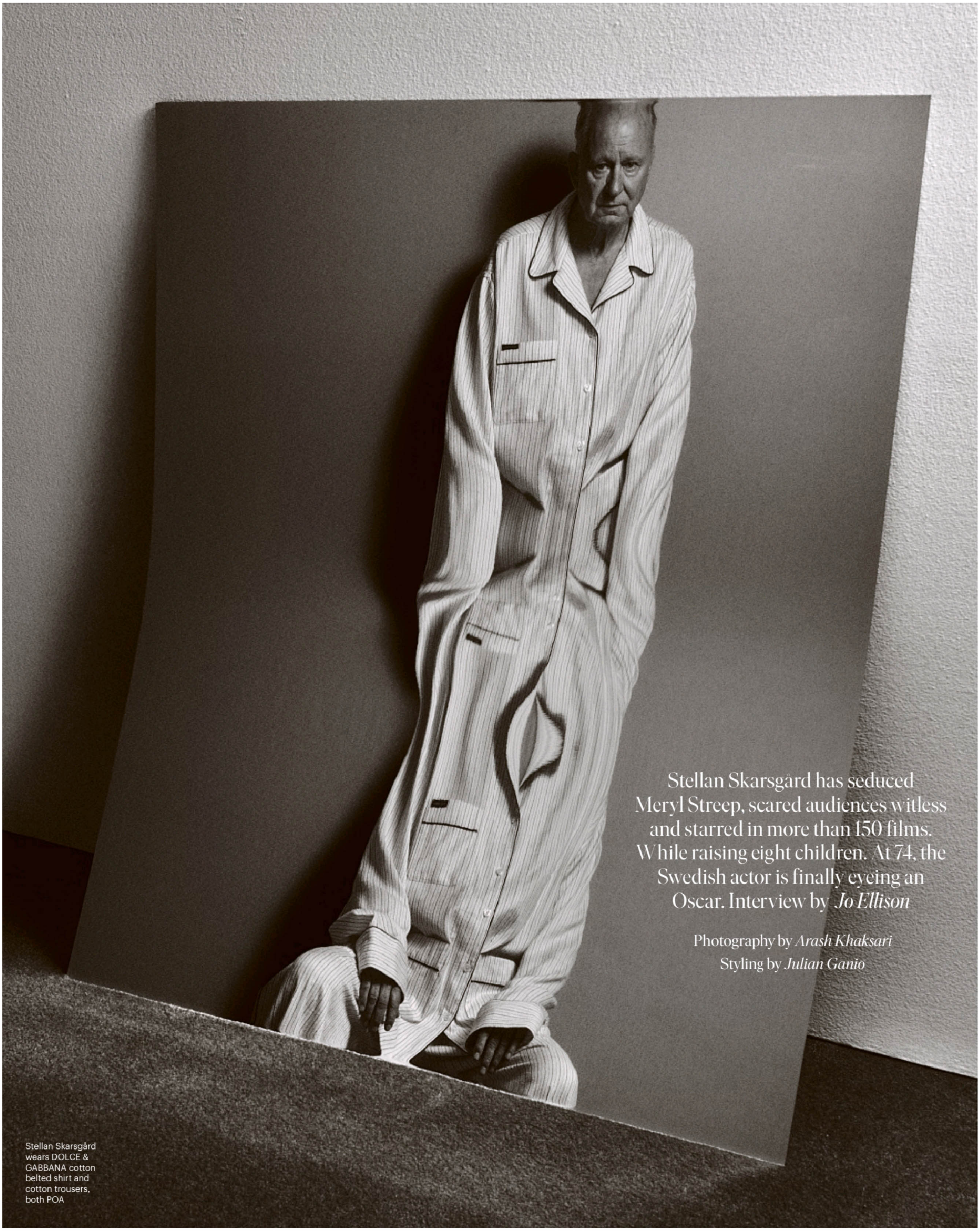
And what about the idea that identical twins are somehow psychically linked? "Twins have this innate connection," acknowledges Erick. "At least we feel it. It's hard to describe. It's not necessarily mind-reading, but I think there's a strong sense of [knowing] each other. Within Lucumí, they always say the *ibejí* are basically one spirit in two bodies." ■**HTSI**

Elliot & Erick Jiménez: El Monte is at Pérez Art Museum Miami until 22 March

PHOTOGRAPHS: ERICK & ELLIOT JIMÉNEZ, COURTESY OF THE ARTISTS AND SPINELLO PROJECTS (3). ZACHARY BALBER



FATHER FIGURE



Stellan Skarsgård has seduced Meryl Streep, scared audiences witless and starred in more than 150 films. While raising eight children. At 74, the Swedish actor is finally eyeing an Oscar. Interview by *Jo Ellison*

Photography by *Arash Khaksari*
Styling by *Julian Ganio*

Stellan Skarsgård wears DOLCE & GABBANA cotton belted shirt and cotton trousers, both POA

Above: DUNHILL wool and silk coat, POA. HERMÈS cotton poplin shirt with breastplate, £1,014. CHARVET silk tie, POA. Throughout: trousers, Chelsea boots and watch, Skarsgård's own unless otherwise stated

Opposite: CELINE wool oversized polo sweater, £1,250. MM6 MAISON MARGIELA cotton jogging trousers, £450. DOLCE & GABBANA shearling sandals, POA

Stellan Skarsgård is standing in a studio in Paris, posing for a picture as the photographer Arash Khaksari micromanages the actor's feet. "A little to the left… To the right. Could you shift your left foot just 2cm forward?"

Skarsgård – tall, looming, well over 6ft in his socks – shuffles obligingly. "Forward," the photographer continues. "That's right. Then just to the side…" The actor's expression darkens momentarily with frustration. "If you were my director in a film right now, I would kill you," he laughs. The exchange only takes a second, and yet it seems a neat encapsulation of Skarsgård's range. He's obliging, responsive and collaborative, then flashes an intense ferocity that, if not exactly scary, keeps one on one's toes.

Skarsgård has been acting for nearly 60 years. A former child actor, he has made more than 150 films and TV shows. You may recognise him as the fringed scarf-wearing schmarm who tries to corrode young Matt Damon in *Good Will Hunting*. Or as the buccaneering Bootstrap Bill Turner in *Pirates of the Caribbean*. You may have watched him torture Daniel Craig in *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* or woo Meryl Streep in *Mamma Mia*. Then again, you may not recognise him when he pops up in unexpected roles. His international breakthrough came in 1996, as the oilman Jan in *Breaking the Waves* by Lars von Trier. He has since made six films with the Danish director, a collaboration only rivalled by that with Norwegian director Hans Petter Moland, with whom he has made five films, and who has become a close friend.

Post-shoot, dressed in his own clothes, the 74-year-old cuts a striking figure in a suave dark uniform that hangs off his rangy frame. His eyes are ice blue, his skin baby soft. Years ago, the director Miloš Forman praised him for having an "instantly forgettable" face. He could have taken it as an insult, but instead channelled his "vanishability" into a vast spectrum of roles.

Today, he is promoting *Sentimental Value*, in which he plays Gustav Borg, the narcissistic father at the centre of a family drama directed by Joachim Trier. It's become one of the most commercially successful films to have come out of Norway, and Skarsgård is in the midst of a red-carpet push that may well afford him his first Academy Award. Skarsgård's character, a famous director and the father of two estranged daughters (one of whom is now an actor), is revisiting the family home. The subject matter touches Skarsgård, even if only peripherally, as the father of a large creative brood. Married twice, he has eight children ranging in age from 13 to 49. Five are actors; Alexander, the eldest, has lately been steaming up the big screen in the BDSM romcom *Pillion*. Like the Borgs of *Sentimental Value*, the Skarsgårds share the bohemian kinship of an artistic clan. Unlike the Borgs, they are close-knit – all the children still live in Stockholm, either near or in the family home.

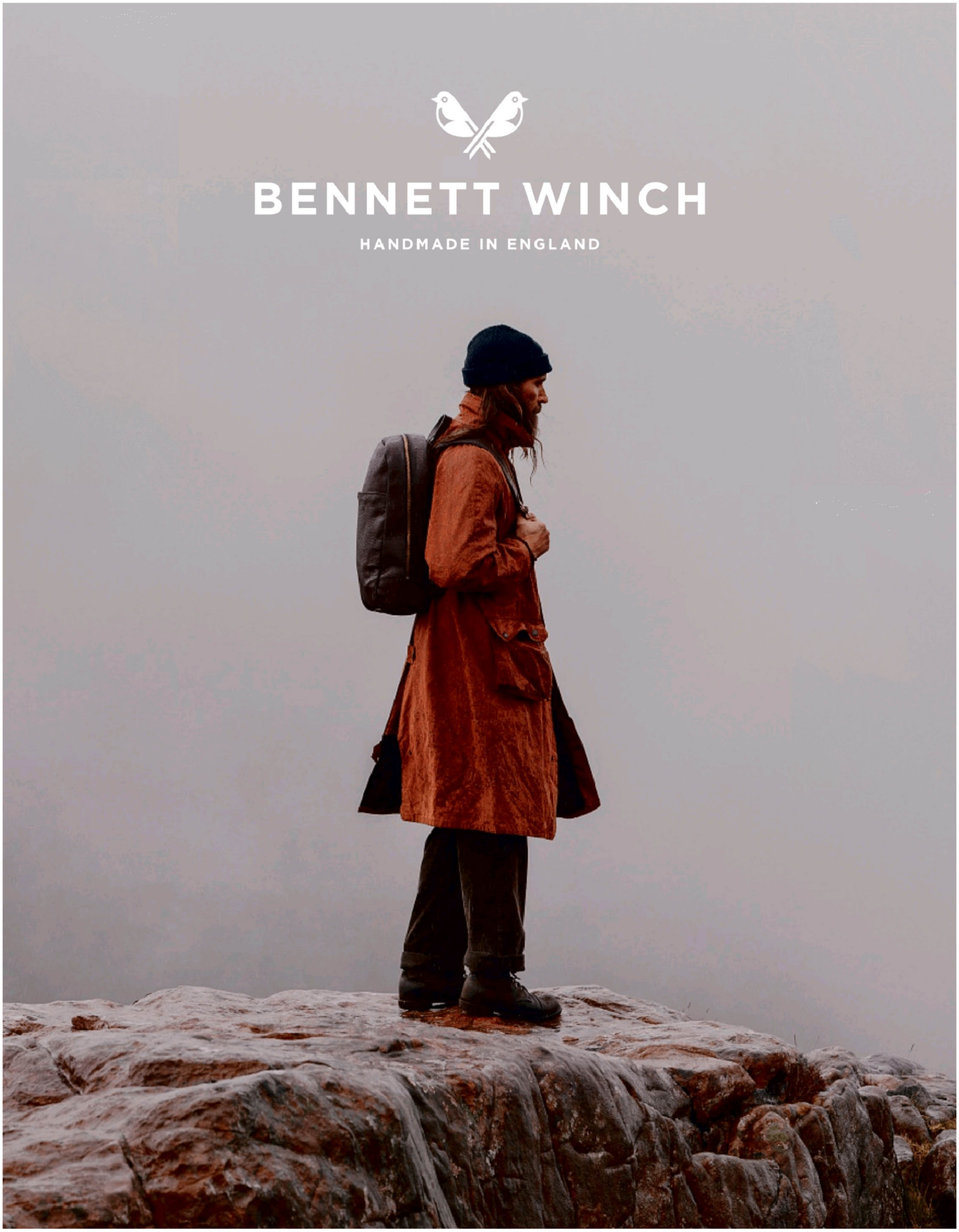
Sentimental Value portrays a powerful parent so selfishly preoccupied with his creative output that he neglects his kin. Trier wrote the screenplay for Skarsgård. But the actor does not recognise himself in Gustav Borg: he was a hands-on parent who worked only a third of the year. "I didn't do much self-reflection when I did [*Sentimental Value*]. But my children reminded me that maybe I should have done," he says. "My second son called me after he'd seen it and asked: 'Do you recognise yourself?' 'What do you mean?' I said. 'I worked only four months a year and the rest of the time I was changing diapers and wiping asses!' But I do understand that my love for work, for my art, made me incapacitated, sometimes, at home. You cannot be a part-time artist. If you let go of it, you let go of who you are."

Skarsgård allowed his children to do whatever they chose to, and refused to give advice. Alexander has said that as a child he longed for his family to be "normal". He wanted his father to work in "data" and "wear a suit" instead of "hippie sarongs or nothing", as was his wont. (It was possibly the search for a more boundaried existence that saw Alexander join the Swedish marines.) "Out of eight kids there are maybe two, three who really needed all the attention," says Skarsgård, "and they were really difficult. And then there are some of them who are happier anyway."

Born in Gothenburg in 1951, Skarsgård had parents who likewise encouraged his creative impulses – nonconformists in the tradition of the truly egalitarian Swede. His father was "a lovely but flawed" mid-level executive who "was the most radical father you could have. We grew up without any sort of oppression. We were treated like adults from the beginning, which was fantastic. My father read every book there was to read. But he was bad at economy, so we got evicted twice."

Skarsgård, a "responsible" oldest sibling, started working early. "I was in my first professional play when I was 14." A role in the state television series *Bombi Bitt och jag* then made him a teen heartthrob – "I got extremely famous" – but he stopped acting in film in his early 20s to focus on the stage. "My first film was a sort of soft, soft porn," he says of his early cinematic efforts. "I made three dogs in a row. But I had no money because I was working in the theatre so I had to take the job." Was he mortified by the experience? "Not mortified. Because I'd never be mortified by porn," he says. "But I didn't

“I’VE HAD THE MOST WONDERFUL CAREER BECAUSE I’VE BEEN IN THE WONDERFUL MIDDLE WHERE I COULD DO WHATEVER I WANT”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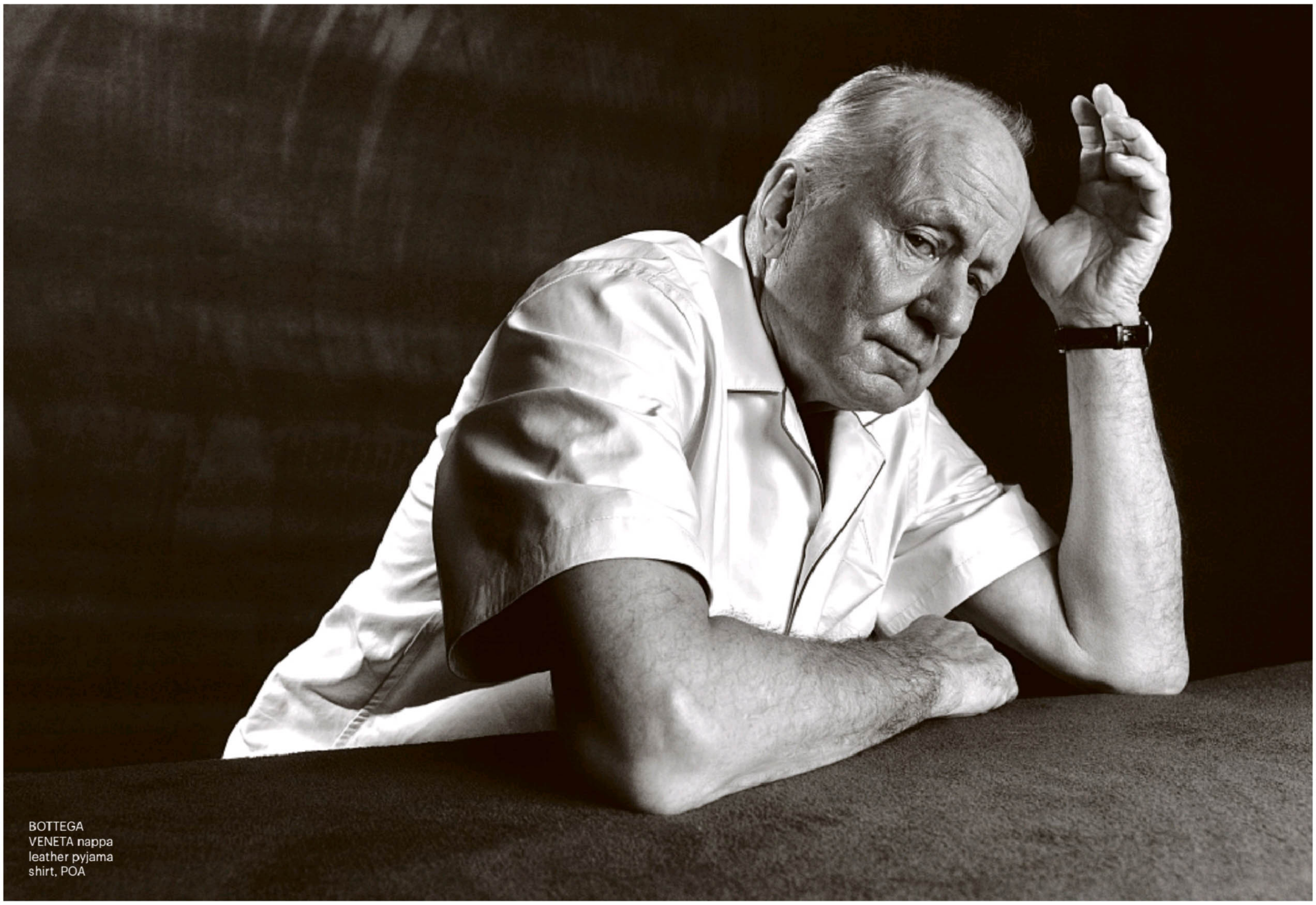


BOTTEGA VENETA nappa leather pyjama shirt, POA

know that grown-ups could make such bad films." He spent 16 years at the Royal Dramatic Theatre in Stockholm, where he did lots of Strindberg and worked with Ingmar Bergman, the fabled but manipulative Swedish filmmaker whom Skarsgård once described as "the only person I know who cried when Hitler died". He had no formal training. The "naïve" habits he had as a child actor still inform his roles today. "Nothing comes from what I've studied, because I haven't studied," he says simply. "You learn better on the job."

His genius is in the unspoken gesture. He can't stand it when actors "show their tools". He quotes Goethe, "*Man merkt die Absicht und man ist verstimmt*", which means something akin to: "you feel the intention and it bums you out". It was a line that spoke to Trier as well. "[Stellan] doesn't like things to show," says the director. "He's not telling the story, he's behaving. His concern is human truth."

Neither does Skarsgård give much credence to a character's likeability. He made his name in US cinema in the '90s by playing a succession of "bad guy" roles. "When I first came to Hollywood, it was at a time when the American market was the main market, which meant that anybody with an accent had to play a villain. The xenophobia was rampant. I could only play Russians or Germans, or things where I had to be killed at the end."

The typecasting bemused him. "I did not know what they meant by the 'bad guy'. I can't accept it, this code where you can't show a person having many sides. The Hays Code of Conduct [a form of self-censorship that governed Hollywood from the 1930s to the '60s] may have dissolved but its impact is still felt today. I'm an atheist, and I don't believe in good and evil. I don't like this bad and good. We should be careful about making moral judgments of other people because that is very dangerous."

Skarsgård has a powerful sense of justice. Years ago, he refused to sign a Disney contract that required him to adhere to a behavioural code that prohibited him from "upsetting" society. "I said, what kind of society? Is it Salt Lake City or is it Kabul? And then it became an infringement on my constitutional rights – free expression and stuff. So eventually they got very bored with me and found a write-around."

He doesn't give advice, but the best advice he was ever offered came via his father, something he lives by to this day. "Don't think that anyone is better than you. And don't think that anyone is worth less than you." It all sounds very Swedish. "Well, so we are," he shrugs.

Skarsgård's appetite to explore the entire human psyche has not yet been satisfied. Recently he played Boris Shcherbina in the HBO series *Chernobyl*. He also played Baron Vladimir Harkonnen, the monstrous, floating blob who haunts Denis Villeneuve's *Dune* films. "I've had the most wonderful career because I've not been at the bottom, I've not been at the top. I've been in the wonderful middle where I could do whatever I want."

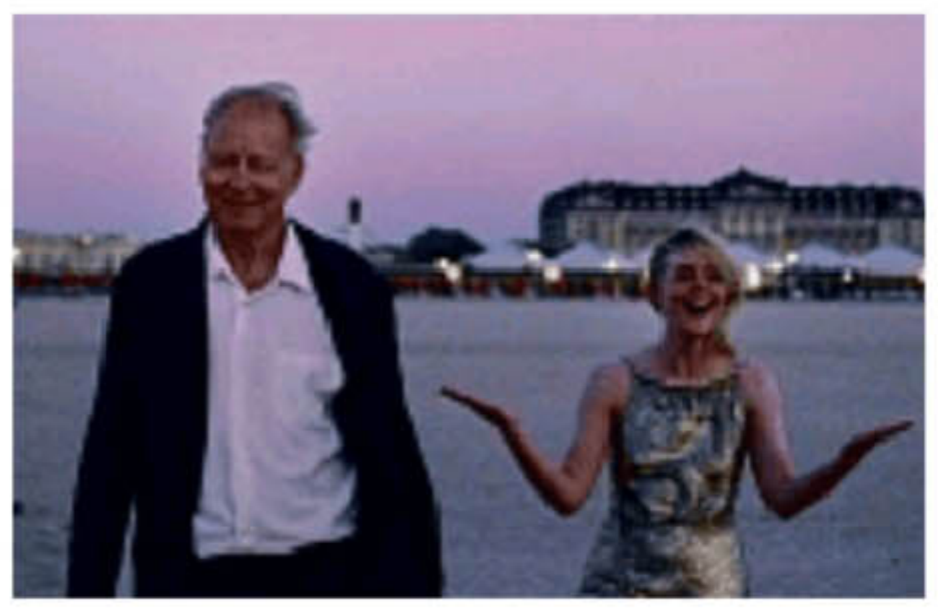
Trier says that one of Skarsgård's defining qualities is that he's not a "solo player". He's not interested in parts for their own sake. "I'm not an Actors Studio actor," says Skarsgård. "I'm not tortured. Acting is not a very cerebral word for me. What I love about being on a film set, being with actors and being in theatre also, is the circus quality." In this circus, is he the dancing pony? The knife thrower? Or the monkey on the drum? "I don't know," he chuckles, before conceding that he has "ringleader" energy. Since he's the father of eight children, one might assume he took a patriarchal role on set. "Yes," he says. "But in a non-hierarchical way. It has to be on

With Emily Watson in *Breaking the Waves* (1996)

With Robin Williams in *Good Will Hunting* (1997)

With Pierce Brosnan and Colin Firth in *Mamma Mia! The Movie* (2008)

As Baron Vladimir Harkonnen in *Dune: Part Two* (2024)



With Elle Fanning in *Sentimental Value* (2025)

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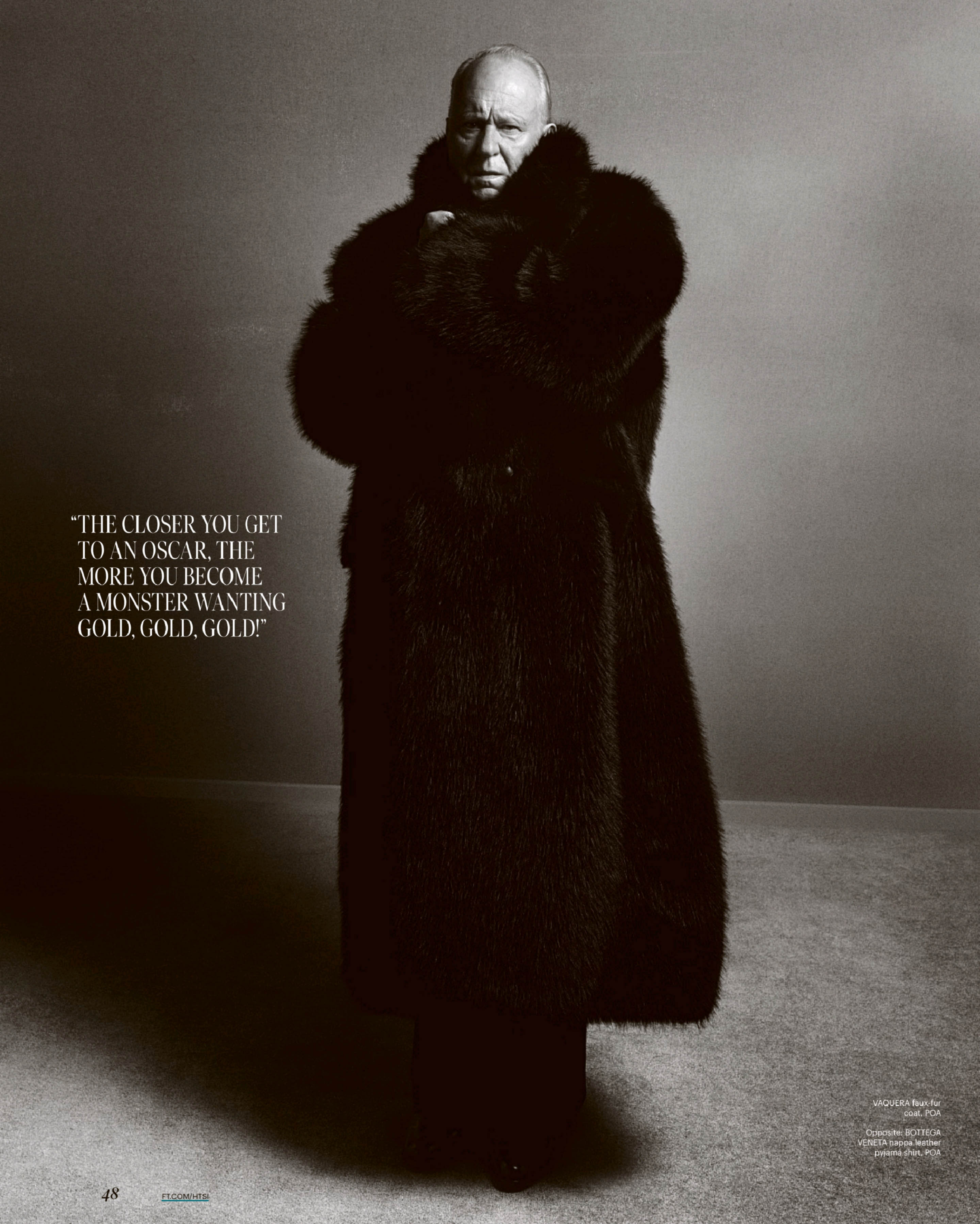
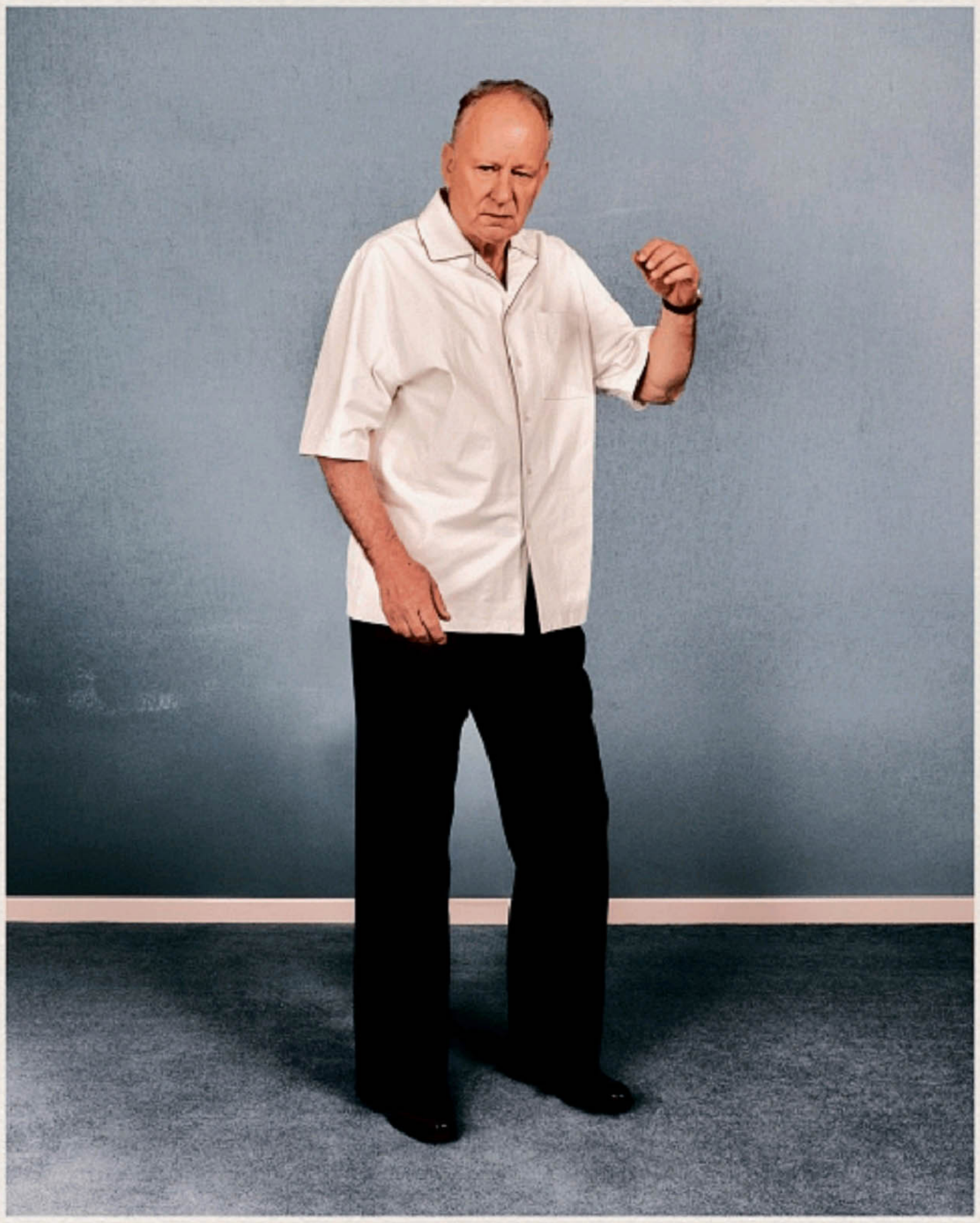
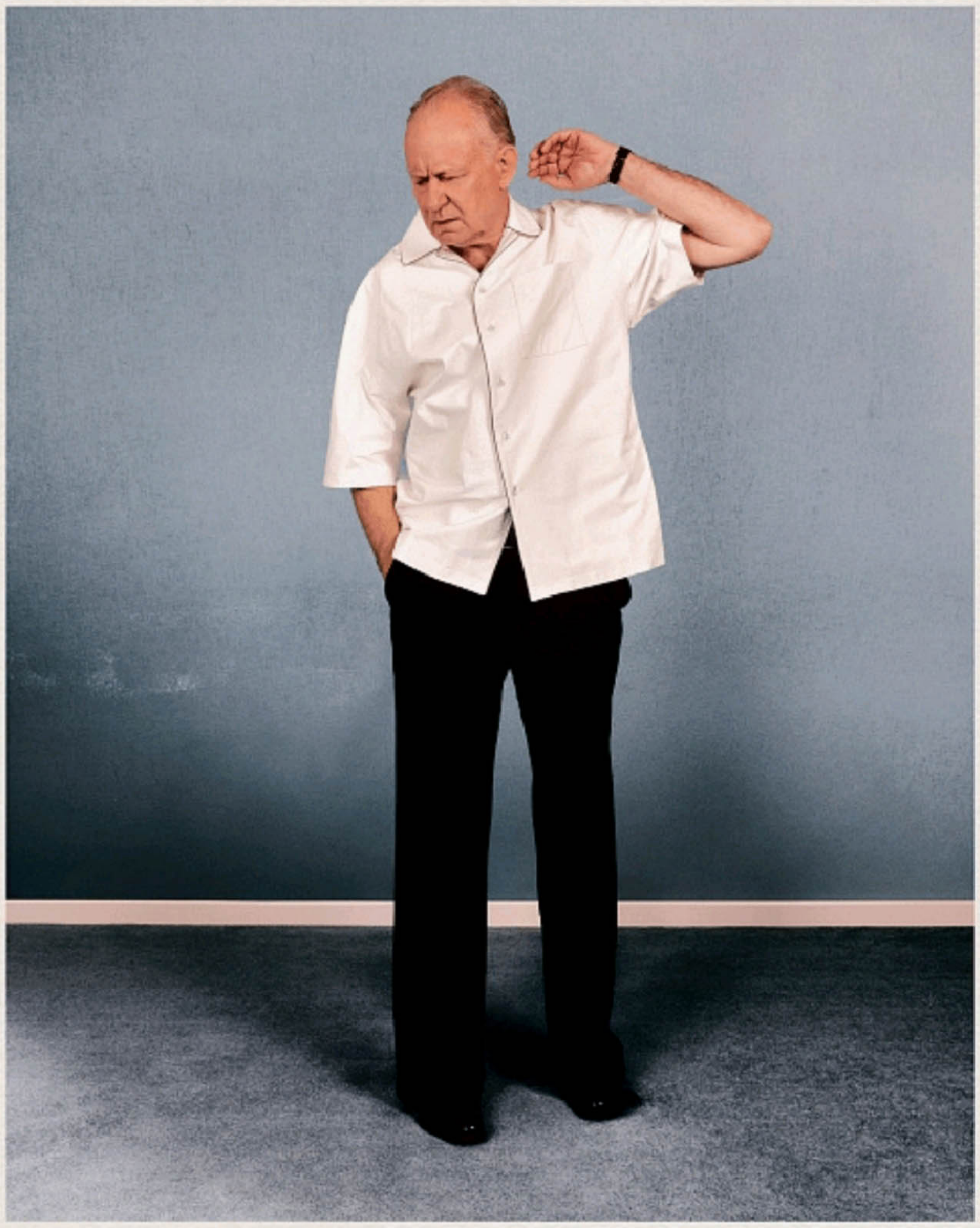


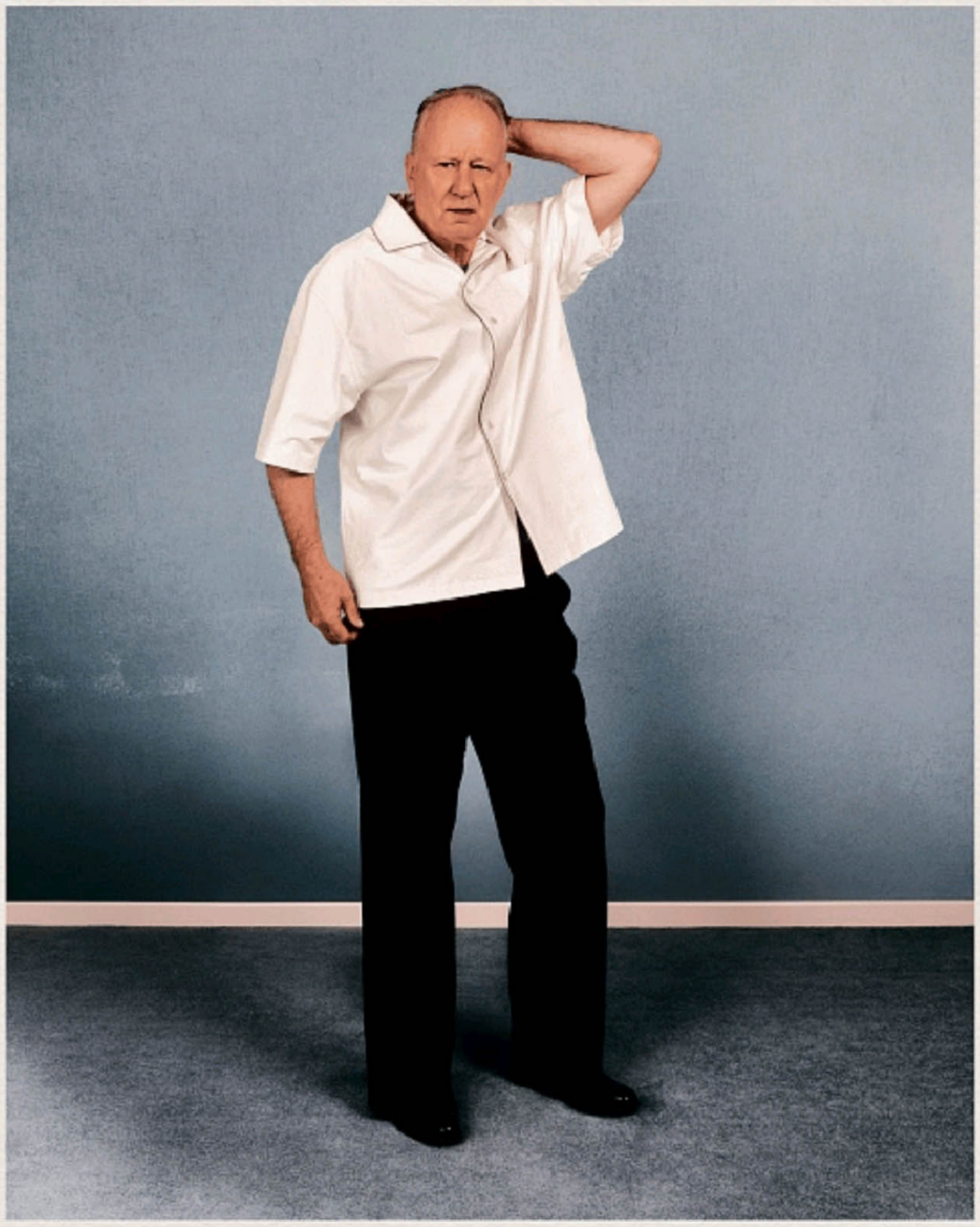
“THE CLOSER YOU GET TO AN OSCAR, THE MORE YOU BECOME A MONSTER WANTING GOLD, GOLD, GOLD!”

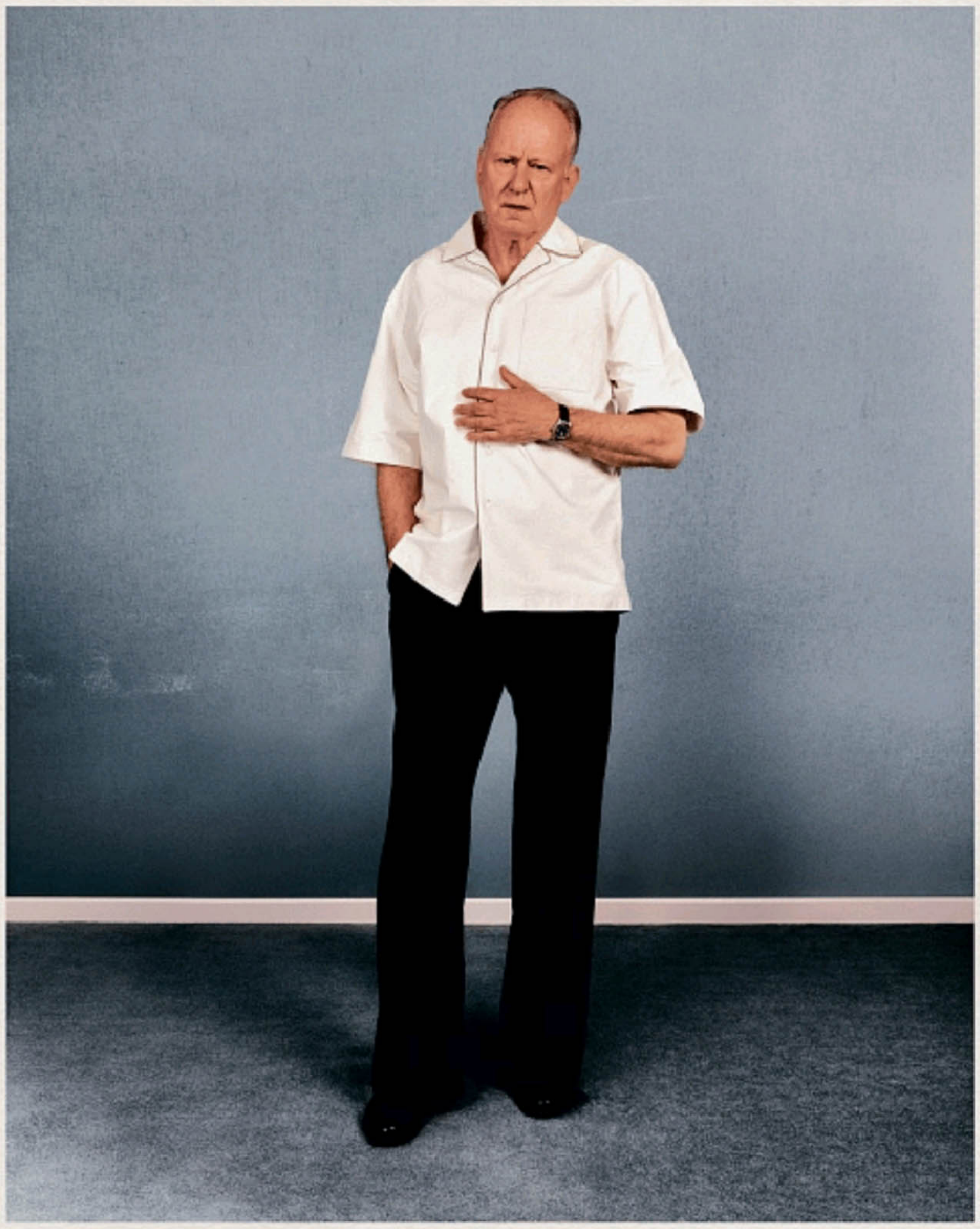
VAQUERA faux-fur coat, POA

Opposite: BOTTEGA VENETA nappa leather pyjama shirt, POA









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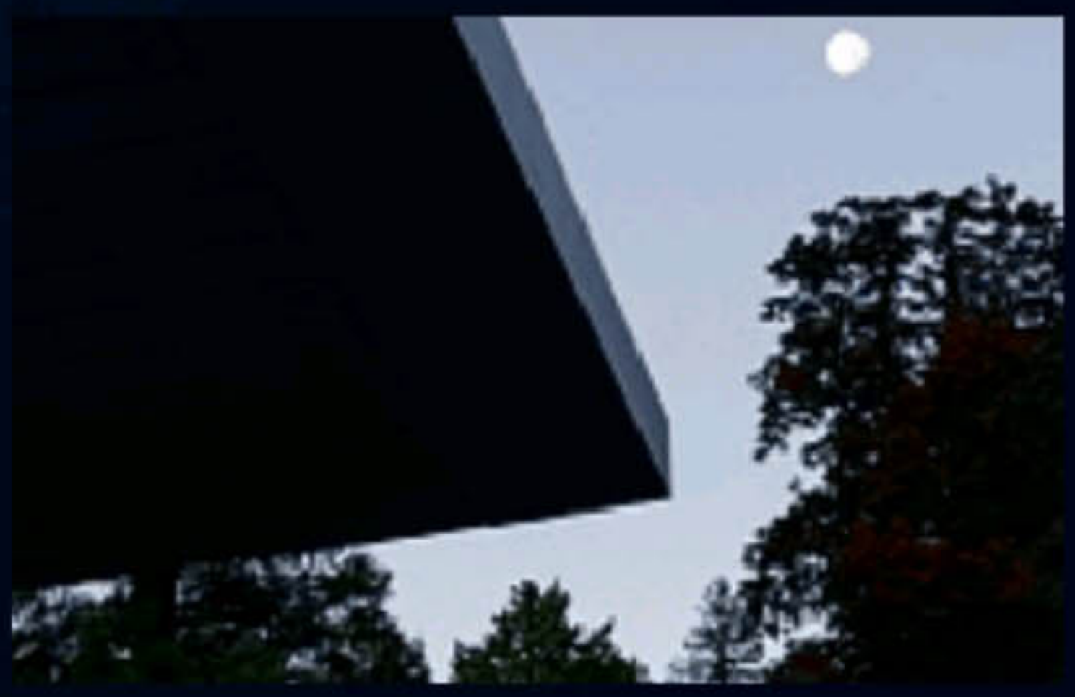
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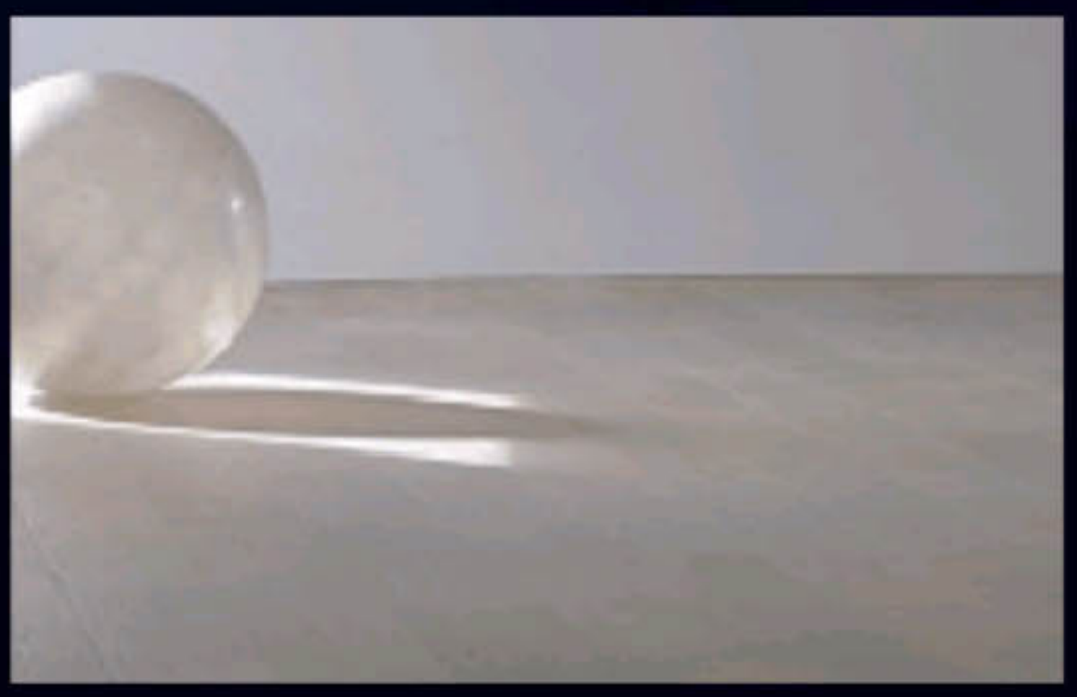
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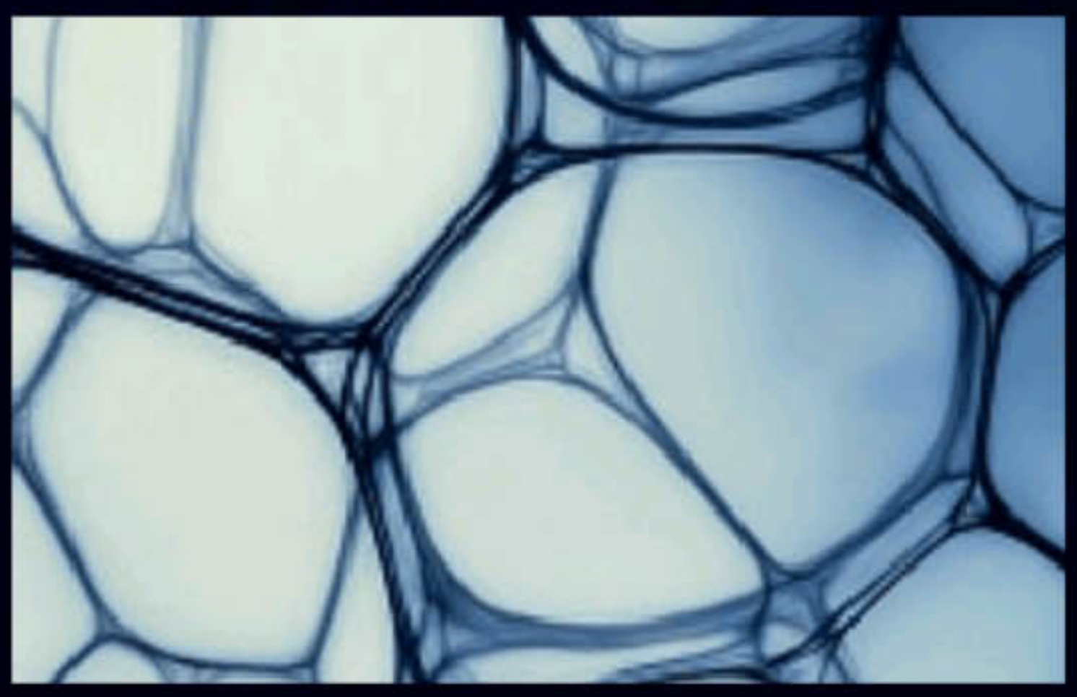
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equal terms. I work hard at making everyone feel good." Diego Luna, Skarsgård's co-star in the Disney series *Andor: A Star Wars Story,* says: "Stellan never takes the easy path. He's always challenging himself and everyone around him – always humble, always honest, a true team player."

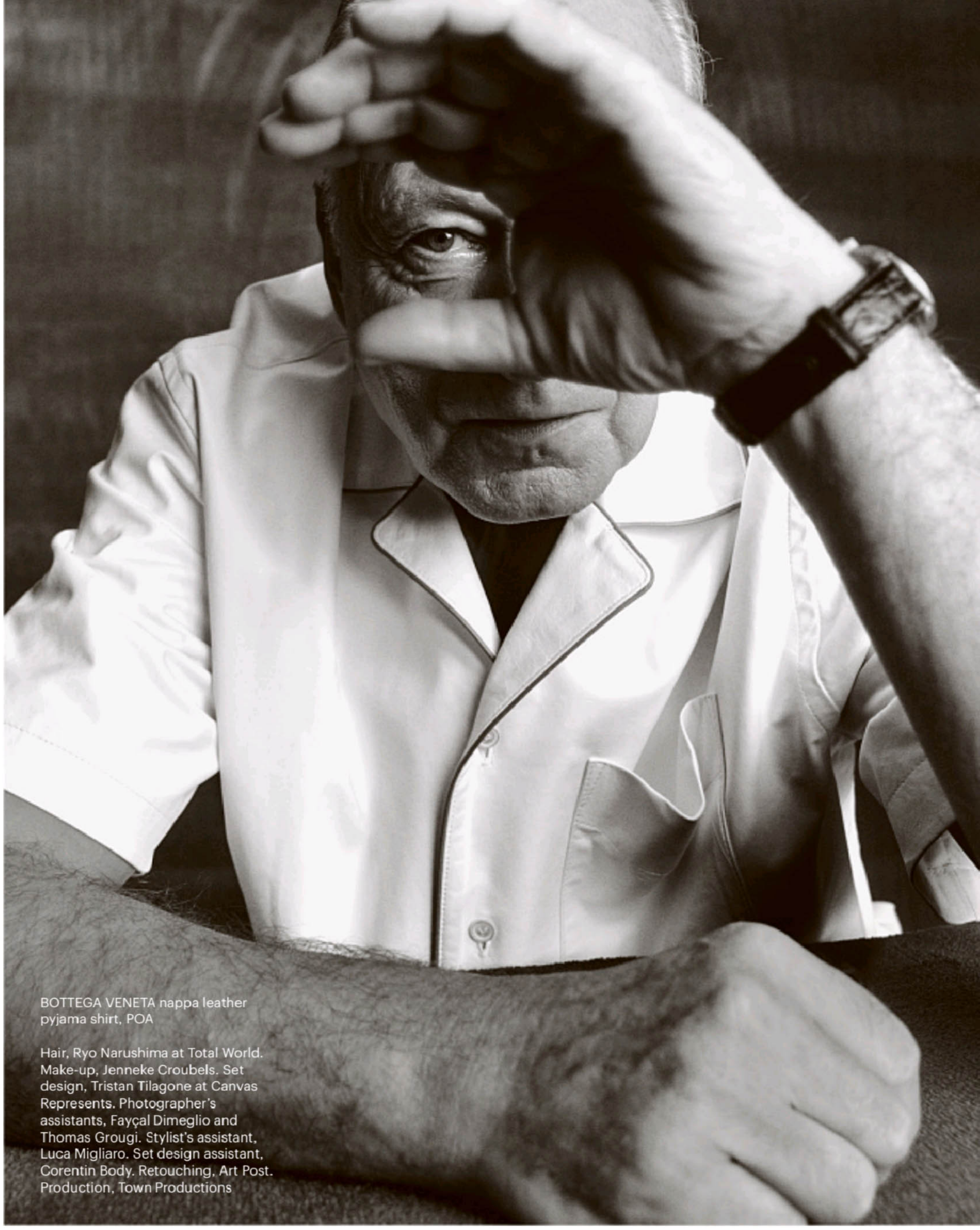
"Stellan is extremely popular. I call him Mr Cinema because he knows all the tricks," adds Trier. "He doesn't like to be in his trailer waiting. He's more at home on set. Stellan shows up in the morning and wants to hang out, sit next to the camera team, or me, and just make jokes. He's really interested in being a part of the film family."

His energy is ferocious. Even during preparation for this interview, his publicist mentioned how keen she was to keep him "occupied" all day. "I never sit," says Skarsgård. "I'm always pacing. But I'm not maniacal. What I like about the set is that there are things happening all the time. People say it's boring, but if you know what's happening, it's fantastic. To watch all those skilled people… You get a rush of energy."

Age has slightly dampened his output. He suffered a major stroke in 2022. The resulting cognitive impairment means that, on set, he must be fed lines in an earpiece, and he will not do theatre again. He finds it harder to follow sentences with lots of clauses, or to follow conversations with many trains of thought. "It's a little harder to read László Krasznahorkai, who won the Nobel Prize, as he's got sentences that run over whole pages. But Hemingway I can read."

Even so, he's still the man most likely to keep carousing through the night. "He's kind of hardcore," says Trier, who has been on the road with the *Sentimental Value* crew since their triumph at Cannes last May. "He's at an age we might expect him to want to go to bed but we often end up sitting up late and talking about life."

A publicist interrupts our conversation to announce that Skarsgård has just been nominated for a Golden Globe for best supporting actor. He will face Paul Mescal (*Hamnet*) and Sean Penn (*One Battle After Another*), among others, in the category. Immediately, his phone starts quacking (his ringtone is a duck) as he receives a succession of urgent congratulatory calls. He hits the silent button: "I gotta turn this shit off. Now, where were we?" If he's thrilled by the news, he's an even better actor than I thought.



BOTTEGA VENETA nappa leather pyjama shirt, POA

Hair, Ryo Narushima at Total World. Make-up, Jenneke Croubels. Set design, Tristan Tilagone at Canvas Represents. Photographer's assistants, Fayçal Dimeglio and Thomas Grougi. Stylist's assistant, Luca Migliaro. Set design assistant, Corentin Body. Retouching, Art Post. Production, Town Productions

A month later, Skarsgård wins the Globe, and we catch up once again. The prize has put him in serious contention for an Oscar. Has the promise of that great bauble seen his famous Swedish equanimity start to slip? "Of course you care about it. And the closer you get, you become a monster that wants gold, gold… Gold!" he laughs. "I've managed my whole life without one, so I will manage without one for the rest of my life too. But it would be special. No Scandinavian male actor has ever won."

In a slightly unexpected detour, awards season has also made him a viral meme. One of the Critics Choice Awards' most memorable images is a picture of Skarsgård at the *Sentimental Value* table, his three female co-stars giggling and sharing a selfie moment while he stares forlornly at his plate. "It's a very funny picture," Skarsgård admits, before insisting: "The girls are very lovely. I was just glum about the food."

Food is a major issue for Skarsgård (you can see him knocking up dinner in old footage on YouTube while Alexander, then a poppety infant, does his homework in their apartment home). So important is it that he sacrificed a significant chunk of his fee for *Sentimental Value* to improve the menu every day. "Norway and Sweden have this kind of joking antagonism between us, even though we love each other, that the Norwegians do shitty craft," says Trier, who insists the food on his set was already exceptional. "But Stellan took like a quarter of his salary or something to invest in an even better lunch. We got real plates, and knives and forks, and dessert every day…"

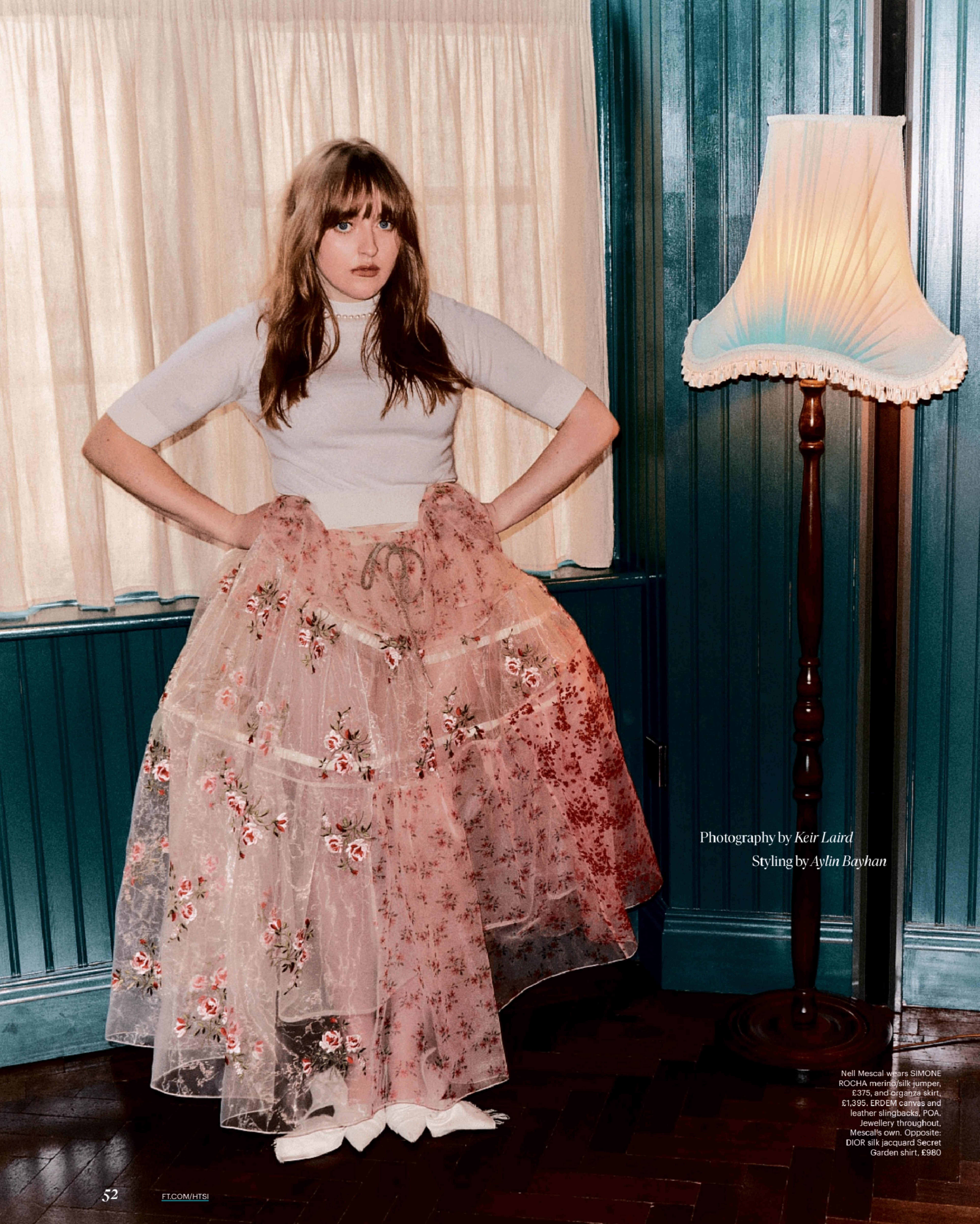
"CINEMA IS NOT TV, WHERE YOU DO THE DISHES AT THE SAME TIME"

Skarsgård's Globe acceptance speech was a eulogy, dedicated to the "pulse" of energy that moves through an audience as they experience a film in the cinema. "It's something I've always cared about," he says. "It's another cultural foundation stone that is threatened. And if we lose these cinemas, we will eventually lose the cinematic language – because it's not necessary for the small screen." What does he mean by cinematic language? "Where the image carries the meaning. And the expression and the language is in the space between the lines. It's the opposite of television language, where everything is exposition, so you don't have to see the image to understand what's going on. You can do the dishes at the same time."

The world needs a few more Skarsgårds. While he may have produced an entire generation of replacements, few can match his skill. He's a welcome dose of candour in a world gone mad with off-camera quips. He's got integrity. And talent. He's not afraid to speak his mind. Long ago, he told an interviewer that everyone should "envy my career". Does he still feel this way? "Yes!" he laughs. "And I've had a fucking great life." He is the daddy, after all. ■**HTSI**

Above centre: Skarsgård with six of his children and his wife, Megan Everett-Skarsgård (far right) at the premiere of *Vi* in Stockholm, 2013. Above: with his son Alexander Skarsgård in 1978

PHOTOGRAPHS: IBL/SHUTTERSTOCK, LENNART EDLING/ALAMY



Photography by *Keir Laird*
Styling by *Aylin Bayhan*

Nell Mescal wears SIMONE ROCHA merino/silk jumper, £375, and organza skirt, £1,395. ERDEM canvas and leather slingbacks, POA. Jewellery throughout, Mescal's own. Opposite: DIOR silk jacquard Secret Garden shirt, £980

Another shot of Mescal

Singer-songwriter Nell Mescal on heartbreak, playing with Haim and her big brother Paul. By *Chris Allnutt*

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Nell Mescal is stubborn and impatient. Or so she claims, at any rate. From where I'm sitting, opposite the Irish singer-songwriter in a north London café, the 22-year-old comes across as thoughtful and easy-going. But, she insists, it is stubbornness that defines her personality and impatience that makes her music what it is. "It's exciting to release songs as soon as you've written and recorded them," says the County Kildare native, toying variously with the sleeves of a thick red cardigan and her many rings. "I'll leave the studio and be like, 'I love this song so much. I just want people to hear it now.'"

Perhaps it's the fact that she and her brother Donnacha have lately been flat-hunting in London, a process that is enough to drive even the saintliest of souls to impatience. Perhaps it's the same ambition that has spurred the meteoric rise of her other brother, the actor Paul (her senior by seven years). Or perhaps it's the natural result of recent successes that have seen Mescal supporting Haim on their UK tour and releasing *The Closest We'll Get*, her second EP.

The tour was a "crazy", surprising experience, she says. "The scariest part of doing this job is not knowing what's coming next, and not knowing if you're going to have a job tomorrow," she says. "The most exciting part is you don't know on a Monday night that you'll be on a Haim tour in four days."

There is an agreeable impatience in the EP's six songs, a collection of yearning ballads in which Mescal contends with the highs and lows of her relationships, supported by light-touch arrangements of piano, guitar and strings. Her focus flits from romantic liaisons to friendship break-ups – including some "really, really horrible ones". I tell her I'm not sure I've ever had a friendship break-up. "Well, you're lucky," she says, attributing her own to dropping in and out of school before eventually leaving her hometown of Maynooth. "[I always come back to] friendship break-ups because they ask so many questions of you."

PHOTOGRAPH: AFF/ALAMY LIVE NEWS

"I ALWAYS WRITE ABOUT FRIENDSHIP BREAK-UPS – THEY ASK QUESTIONS OF YOU"

Above: MIU MIU suede jacket, £5,200, cotton poplin shirt, £900, and silk scarf, POA. Left: CHANEL leather coat and leather shoes (just seen), both POA. Below: Mescal with her brothers Donnacha (left) and Paul at a *Vanity Fair* and TikTok party in Hollywood shortly before the 2023 Oscars

Regular break-ups are source material too. At a concert at Islington Assembly Hall in November, Mescal asked the crowd if anyone wanted to hear a happy song, before apologising for perhaps having too few. "I do care about making sure that not every song in my discography is utter despair," she says, admitting with a cautious smile that she considers herself "hugely emotional". "I've always said if there's at least one hopeful thing in a song, that's the thing that I'm looking for," she says. "Even if that's the drum beat or a breath."

Mescal has never not been ambitious. Growing up, she aspired to every profession before eventually settling on music. "I wanted to be Annie on Broadway," she says. "The fact that my parents didn't fly me over to audition is my biggest grievance with them." She started writing songs at 14 and recording them when she was 16, eventually dropping out of school a year later to move to England and pursue an artistic career. Her parents, who met on an amateur production of *The Pirates of Penzance*, took about 20 minutes to be convinced of this plan. She found allies in her "really creative" brothers, particularly in the trajectory of Paul. "Never say never" is how she describes the

QUIET ONLY IN APPEARANCE.
Groundpiece sofa, design Antonio Citterio

FLEXFORM

prospect of collaborating with him on music, but her sights are rightly set on forging her own path.

Despite primarily being a pianist, she has lately been writing songs on her guitar. "My favourite vocal takes have always just been on a voice memo on my phone. Or a singing video that I posted on Instagram." That rawness informed *The Closest We'll Get*, which was produced by Brooklyn-based Philip Weinrobe, who has worked with Adrianne Lenker, Lake Street Dive and Alanis Morissette. "Nell's songwriting talent is as natural and easy-going as anyone you can imagine, but her real strength is the maturity of her collaborative voice in the studio – a wonderfully open mind and heart with a keen sense of her own vision," says Weinrobe. "This is a difficult balance to strike for anyone, let alone someone just beginning their recording journey."

Next in Mescal's sights is a full-length album. "It's something that I've been working on for quite a while now – figuring out when I'm going to do it, what I'm going to say." She seems, momentarily, to have forgotten her impatience. "I'm starting to feel like I understand myself a lot more. And because of that, the songs are so different every single time I go to write." ■**HTSI**

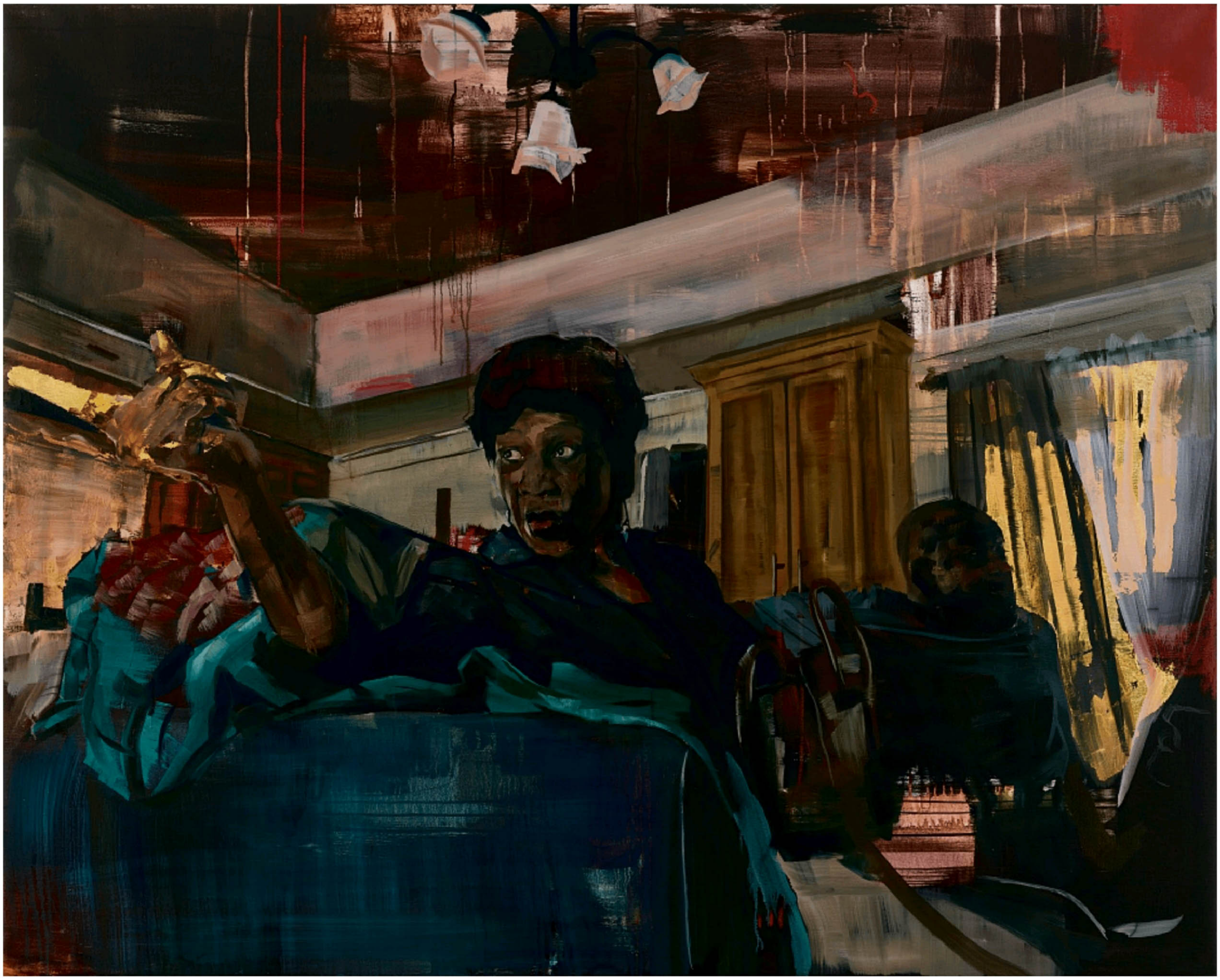
> **"MY FAVOURITE VOCAL TAKES HAVE ALWAYS JUST BEEN A VOICE MEMO ON MY PHONE"**

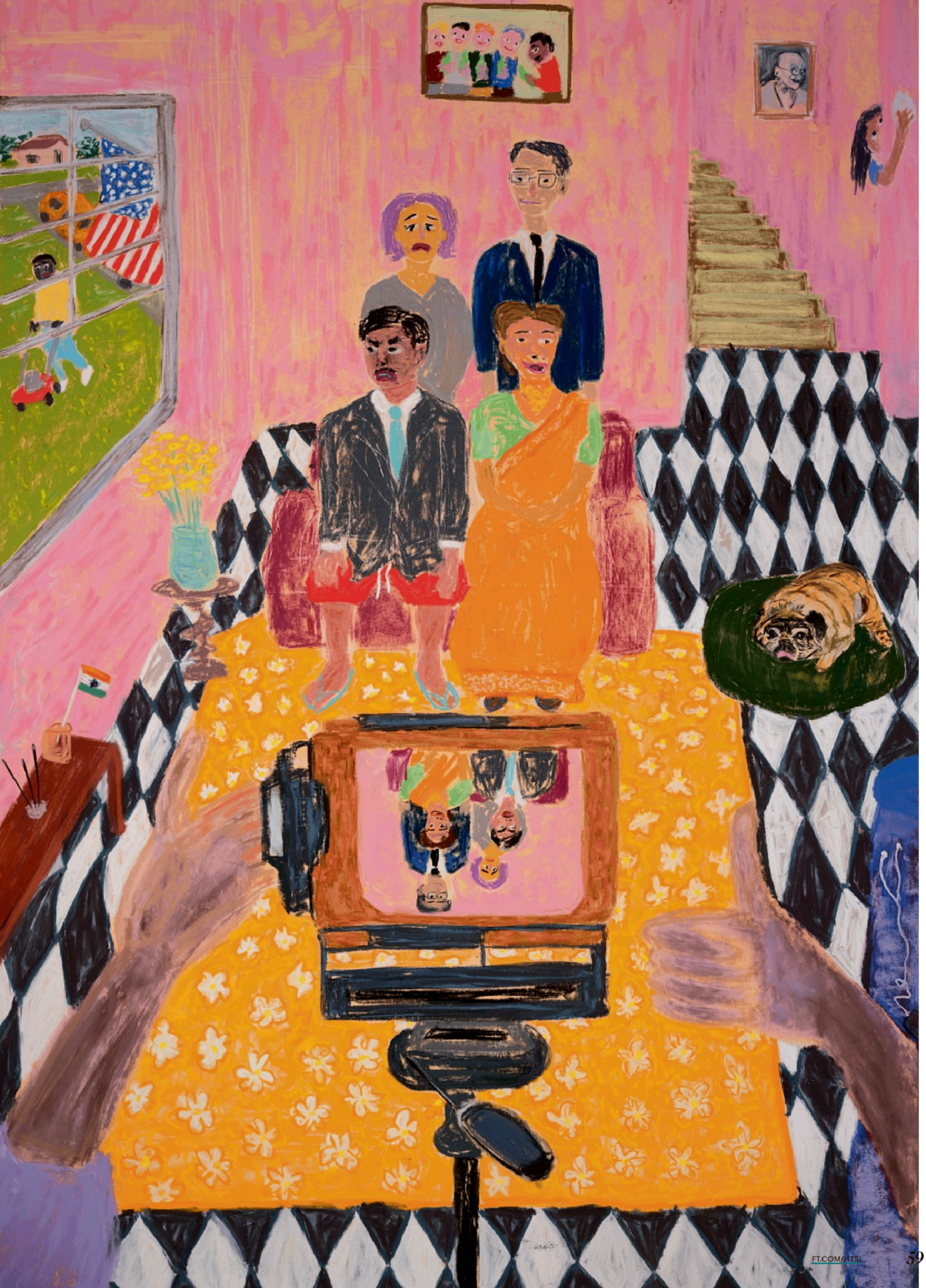
Above: CECILIE BAHNSEN polyamide Diana dress and matching Oda vest, both POA. ERDEM canvas and leather slingbacks, POA, Right: HERMÈS waxed-leather equestrian coat, POA, cotton drawstring skirt, £4,000, and cashmere/silk/cotton canvas trousers, £2,400

Talent, Nell Mescal at Viva London. Hair, Ami Fujita. Make-up, Victoria Martin. Photographer's assistant, Ho Hai Tran. Special thanks to Oisín Rogers at the The Devonshire Soho

My mother, my muse

Charlotte Jansen meets the modern masters of the family portrait





Left: *Family photograph*, 2024, by Sohrab Hura. Opposite: *Come see*, 2025, by Emma Prempeh

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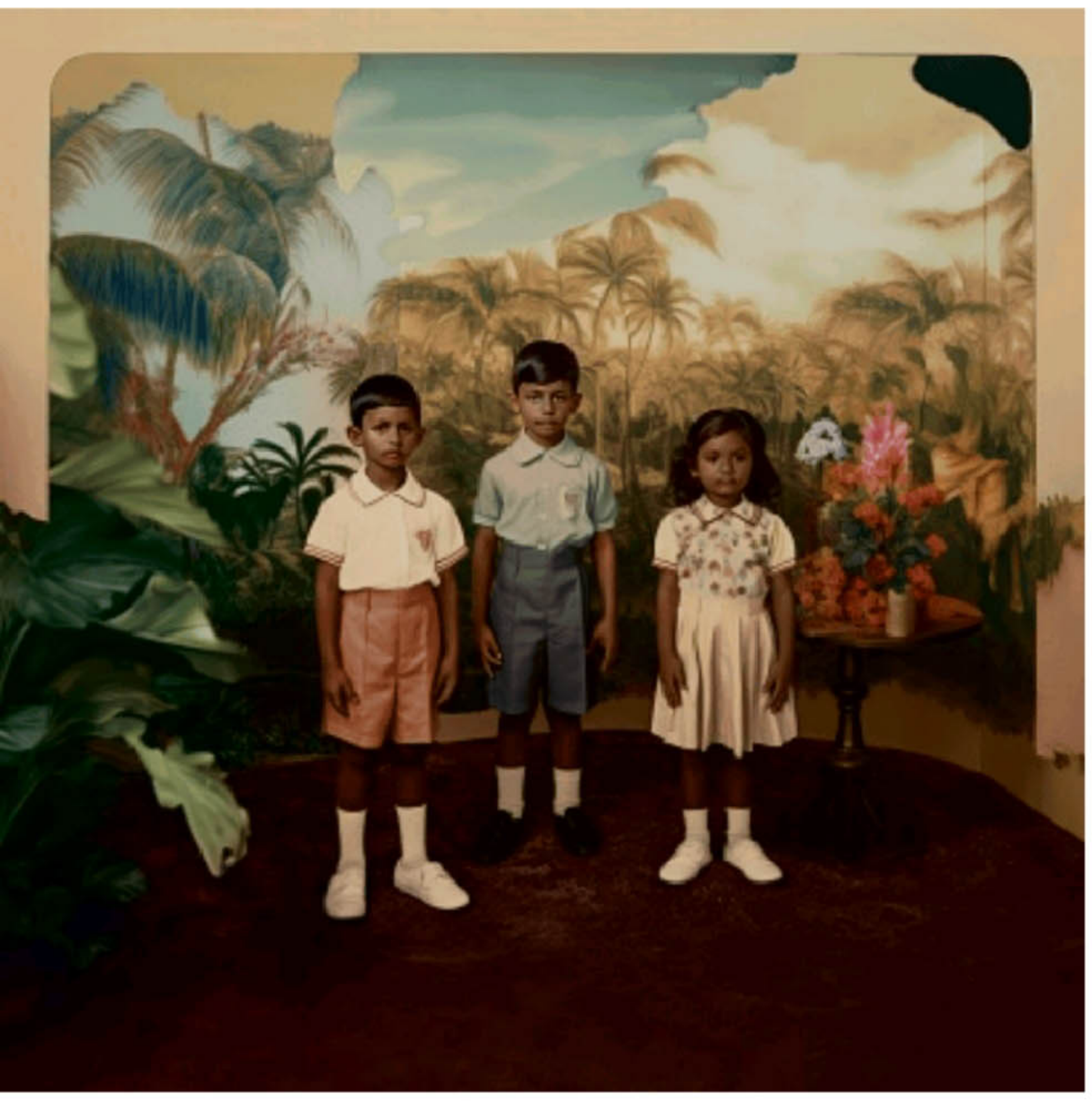
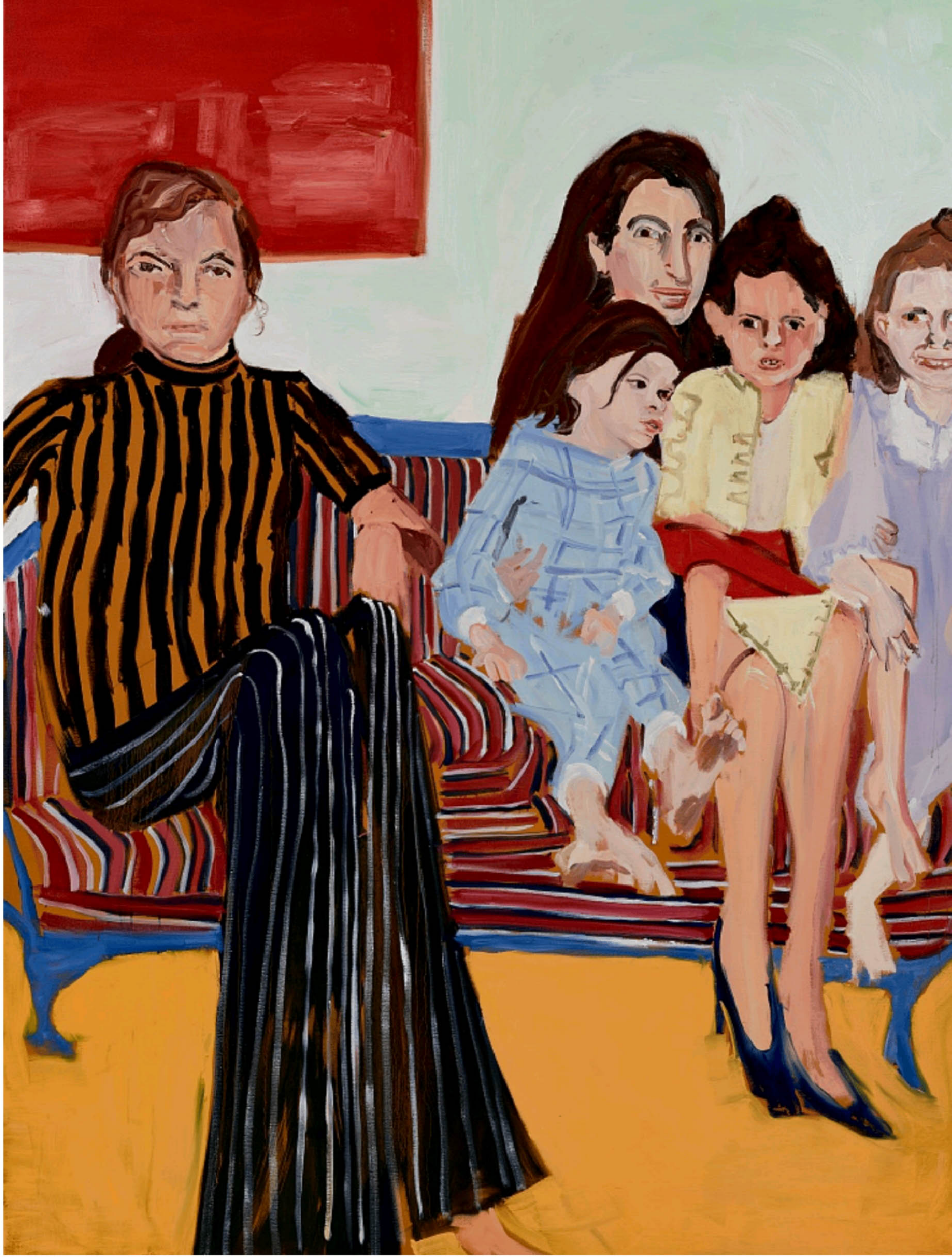
Below: *Souvenir*, 2025, by Sabrina Tirvengadum. Right: *Jasna*, 2025, by Chantal Joffe





PHOTOGRAPHS: CHANTAL JOFFE/COURTESY THE ARTIST AND VICTORIA MIRO. COURTESY OF SOHRAB HURA AND EXPERIMENTER. PRUDENCE CUMING ASSOCIATES LTD/COURTESY OF EMMA PREMPEH. SABRINA TIRVENGADUM/COLLECTION OF AUTOGRAPH, LONDON

Emma Prempeh's panoramic painting *Come see* has an arresting, cinematic presence. It is made in oil, acrylic and Schlag metal – an imitation gold leaf that changes as it oxidises. But it's the central female figure in the scene who commands the attention: seen slightly from below, she is caught mid-conversation, finger wagging in the direction of an unseen person – a gesture that underscores her authority. The woman is Prempeh's mother, Carmen, in one of several paintings made by the artist on a trip to St Vincent in the Caribbean in 2024. It was the first time her mother had returned to her birthplace since leaving for the UK aged 16. "It was a spiritual homecoming for both of us," the artist says.

Prempeh took the trip because she "wanted to look at my family to understand my existence and where I came from. It has been challenging, but also a blessing." She has been estranged from her father, who lives in Ghana, since she was 11. Art has become a way of communicating and addressing absence. During a residency in Accra this spring she plans to confront him – in painting. "I thought, I need to tackle this through my art – it enables me to speak to him, because in conversation he's hard to reach emotionally." A show at London's Tiwani Contemporary gallery this autumn will bring together some of her works.

Prempeh is one of many contemporary artists making work about family. British artist Chantal Joffe has long turned to family photographs for her paintings, using them to reflect on ageing, loss and how we are shaped by memory (see the larger-than-life odes to her late mother and father that appeared in her most recent solo exhibition at Victoria Miro). Photographs by Nan Goldin and Zanele Muholi have chronicled friends and lovers and challenged the image of the traditional nuclear family model. Njideka Akunyili Crosby, meanwhile, blurs the line between private and public in her large-scale works.

They all belong to a well-established canon. The family portrait surged in popularity in the 18th century thanks to masters such as Thomas Gainsborough, Sir Joshua Reynolds and George Romney. The works were used by aristocratic households to assert wealth, status and moral standing. But many contemporary makers are drawn to conveying a different set of ideals. New Delhi-based artist Sohrab Hura's depictions of familial scenes, for instance, are small-scale portraits: pictures that could be carried around. He began photographing his mother as a way to cope after she was diagnosed with schizophrenia. "Photography gave me a lifeline at a time when my world had seemed to crumble, and from then on making photographs became a way for me to deal with the world," he says. In 2022, Hura brought drawing and painting into his practice, allowing him to look at his family in a more elastic and expressive way. In the artist's recent exhibition, *Mother*, at MoMA PS1, his portraits show a deep affection while also capturing something of a parent's distant, unknowable world.

"MY ART ENABLES ME TO SPEAK TO MY FATHER. HE'S HARD TO REACH"

When a family has experienced trauma, exile or displacement, the portrait becomes particularly charged. At London gallery Autograph's group exhibition, *I Still Dream of Lost Vocabularies* (on until 21 March), a series of family portraits reminds me of my own family albums featuring my grandparents in Sri Lanka – smartly dressed, handsome figures arranged by age and posing against tropical backgrounds. Yet in Sabrina Tirvengadum's images, the closer you get, the more confused the details: stairs lead to nowhere, tables float, faces are warped and bodies have odd proportions. They are glitches produced by the AI tool she uses to create the works.

Tirvengadum grew up in the UK with Mauritian-born parents, and had few photographs of her relatives. "With my family mainly in Mauritius, I had images from my

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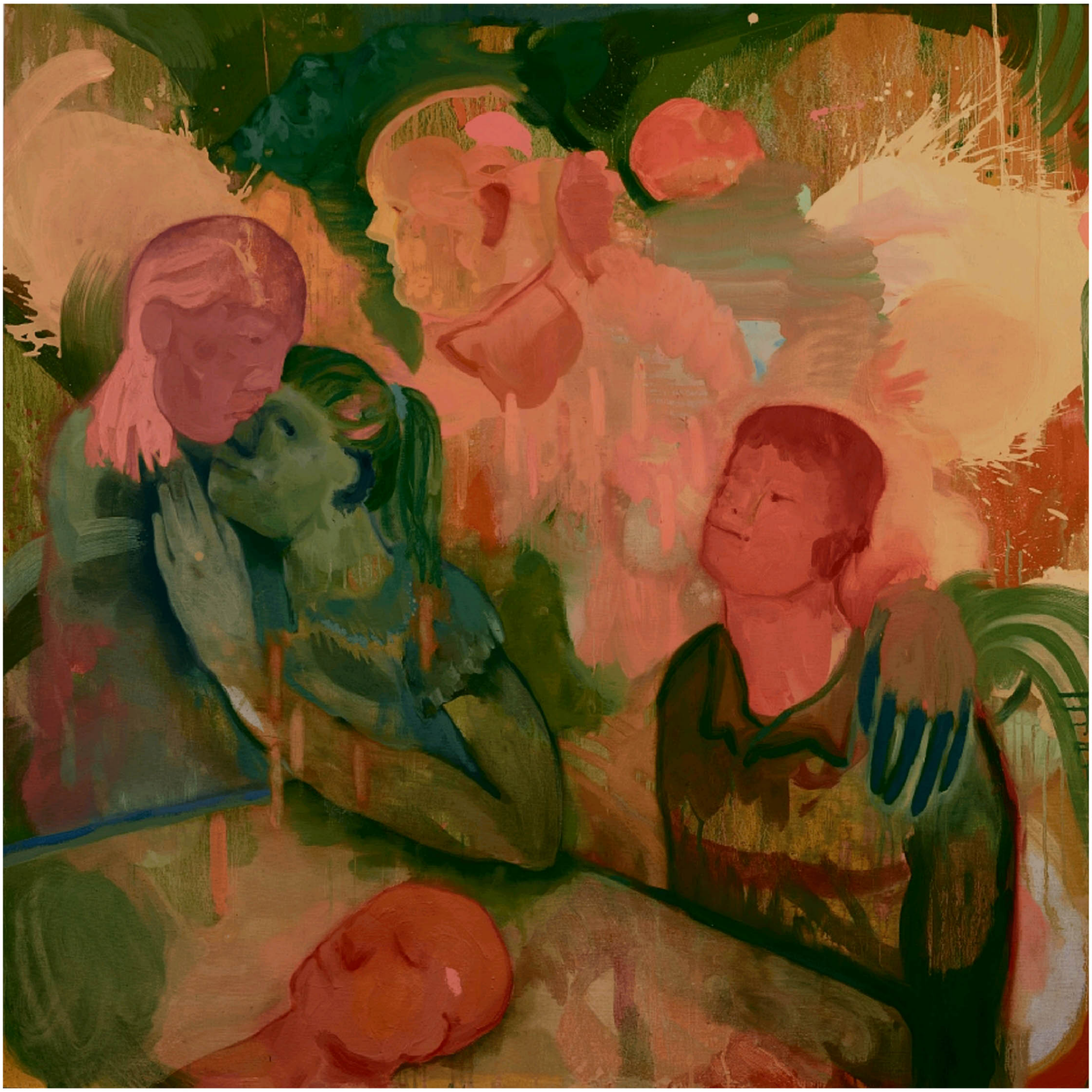


Right: *5L*, 2024, by Antonia Showering

PHOTOGRAPH: COURTESY ANTONIA SHOWERING AND TIMOTHY TAYLOR, © ANTONIA SHOWERING

family archive but little context around stories like the Indian indenture system," she says of the colonial labour regime that saw more than 1.6 million Indian workers taken to the British colonies. "That distance and those historical gaps made me feel disconnected. Exploring them through art became a way to reconnect with my roots."

For people who had to leave their homes without photos, AI can reimagine "moments where no images exist", says Tirvengadum. "It's an opportunity to restore what has been lost and to retell stories. It becomes a way of saying, 'We exist here too.'"

While researching her surname, Tirvengadum discovered a link, confirmed by DNA, to a French aristocratic family, the Marrier d'Unienvilles, for whom her great-grandmother had worked as a maid. It changed completely the notion she had of her family history. "The work has opened up conversations we hadn't really had before and has brought people closer," she says. "There have been questions about why I'm doing it, but there's also an understanding that this wider history of indentureship needs to be spoken about."

Somerset-based painter Antonia Showering became particularly interested in painting her family while she was a student because they were reliably available. It's another tradition: James Abbott McNeill Whistler's dour portrait of his mother from 1871 only exists because his original model didn't show up. Showering painted her younger brother most frequently while at the Slade School of Fine Art in London. "I assumed he was delighted to feature, but when I asked him about it, he seemed indifferent, and on reflection, that's probably why it was him I chose to paint most at that time," she says. "He didn't sit in interesting positions, or get upset if it was distorted or unflattering. He also became a father young, so seeing our roles within the family move along life's conveyor belt made me want to paint that."

Showering's latest paintings are still informed by family relationships. In the artist's 2025 solo exhibition at Timothy Taylor's gallery in New York, several paintings featured her late grandmother, whom she lived with for many years. "During my grandmother's illness, I struggled to paint anyone else. I wanted to hold on to her, to remember her hands, her hair." In the painting *5L*, from 2024, several figures swirl together in a loving, hazy embrace. "As the work was developing, I realised I had painted our final moment with my grandmother, with family surrounding her," she recalls.

"I WANTED TO HOLD ON TO HER, TO REMEMBER HER HANDS, HER HAIR"

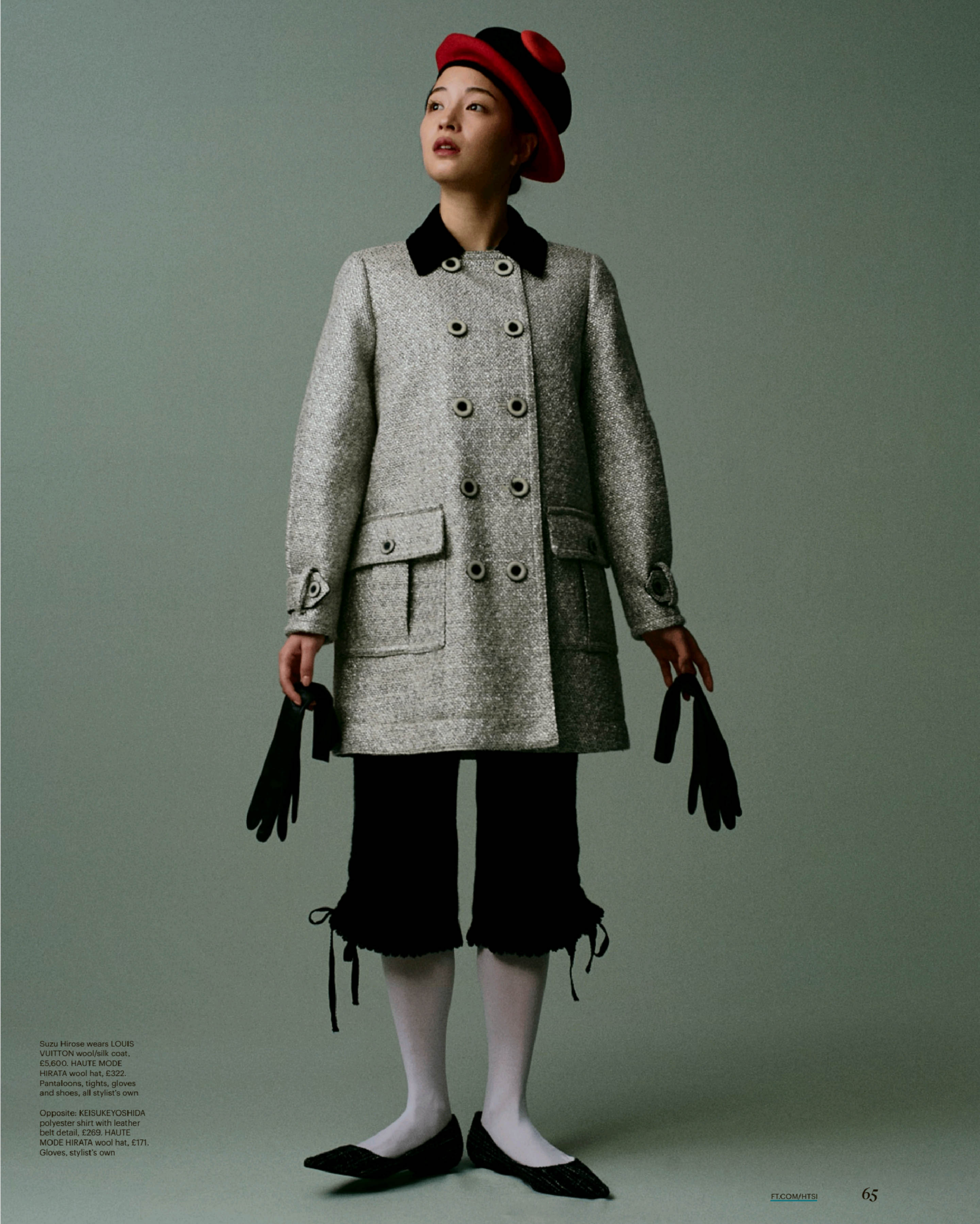
But for Showering, it's important that once the work leaves the studio, she doesn't "put too much onus on who the figures are". She hopes the viewer will "recognise relationships from their own worlds and histories". ■**HTSI**

Suzu Hirose

Photography by *Tess Ayano*
Styling by *Reina Ogawa Clarke*

hits different

A huge star in her native Japan, the 27-year-old actor is going global with a new adaptation of Kazuo Ishiguro's classic debut. By *Ashley Ogawa Clarke*



Suzu Hirose wears LOUIS VUITTON wool/silk coat, £5,600. HAUTE MODE HIRATA wool hat, £322. Pantaloons, tights, gloves and shoes, all stylist's own

Opposite: KEISUKEYOSHIDA polyester shirt with leather belt detail, £269. HAUTE MODE HIRATA wool hat, £171. Gloves, stylist's own

UNDERCOVER cotton-mix embellished dress, POA

Opposite: KEISUKEYOSHIDA polyester shirt with leather belt detail, £269, and wool capri pants, £231. PILLINGS leather shoes, £1,053. HAUTE MODE HIRATA wool hat, £171. Gloves, stylist's own

Suzu Hirose's schedule is run with military precision. On a cold winter's evening in Tokyo, the Japanese actor and model is in our custody for only a brief moment before she is spirited away by her team to another shoot, like a precious package being shipped from set to set.

Residing at the centre of these logistics could be cause for stress for the 27-year-old but, in the cramped, windowless dressing room where I find her, she's the picture of serenity. Sitting balled up in a chair, hair and make-up freshly done, she's wearing a baggy varsity sweater that dwarfs her tiny, glowing face and makes her wide eyes look even wider. It's like being granted an audience with a fairy.

Hirose was born in Shizuoka, a coastal prefecture south-west of Tokyo, to parents who ran a sign-making business. As a teenager she modelled in the quarterly Japanese fashion magazine *Seventeen* alongside her elder sister Alice (who also went on to become an actor), as well as starting to work in film and TV. It was working with Hirokazu Kore-eda, the director behind *Shoplifters* and *Monster*, on the film *Our Little Sister* in 2015 that brought her wider renown.

She has spent her adult life in front of the camera and reached a level of fame in Japan that, despite the gruelling schedule, allows her to remain charmingly carefree. "I'm actually pretty sloppy by nature," she laughs, her voice so low as to be soothing. On filming days, she says, she'll wake up 10 minutes before she has to leave the house.

Hirose is currently preparing for the global release of her biggest project, *A Pale View of Hills*, an adaptation of Nobel Prize-winner Kazuo Ishiguro's debut novel that was first published in 1982, in which she plays the lead. It's been brought to life by director Kei Ishikawa, who gained traction in 2022 with the quietly powerful *A Man*, which won plaudits at the Japan Academy Film Prize awards. Like many narratives by Ishiguro – who was born in Nagasaki in 1954 and moved to England when he was five – this one probes how Japanese and British identity shifted after the second world war. The film follows Etsuko, a Japanese woman living in rural England in the 1980s, as she tells her daughter about her memories of being a young housewife (played by Hirose) in postwar Nagasaki. In those flashbacks, which form the heart of the film, banal daily tasks (cooking, ironing, tending to a distracted, work-obsessed husband and his headmaster father) have resumed following the atomic bomb in 1945, but the radiation and memories hang in the air. It's a dreamy, elegant film, permeated by a sense of terror.

> "MY HOBBIES ARE FOOD AND ALCOHOL"

Etsuko is the puzzle we untangle as the story unfolds. Why did she leave Japan for England? What happened to her husband? Who is her mercurial friend Sachiko and why does she still linger in Etsuko's mind? Hirose is luminous in the role, as a woman at once restrained, demure and beautiful but barely holding it together as chaos builds and whirls. It was the resilience of the character that most appealed to Hirose. "I feel it's very important to see the way women lived in Nagasaki," she says. "There was a real sense of hope that I think can still reach people today. I felt that the colours and texture of the story were piling up inside me until I managed to understand her. Etsuko is earnest, quietly burning with feeling, but also trying to carve out her own path. She lives very honestly." Hirose's approach is driven by instinct: "I don't think I'm very suited to comedy or entertainment roles," she says. "I like being able to use my imagination."

"She's not a big thinker, she's more like an athlete," says Ishikawa. "Throw a curveball at her while filming, and you know she'll smack it back. She can really react to everything." Hirose sees it as a matter of getting into the right headspace: "For better or worse, I can't do anything unless I'm in the right mood."

For this shoot, stylist Reina Ogawa Clarke wanted to bring out Hirose's energy and confidence (the actor has been a Louis Vuitton ambassador since 2020). "She looks cute and quiet but she also has this strength about her," she says. "It's clear that she knows who she is."

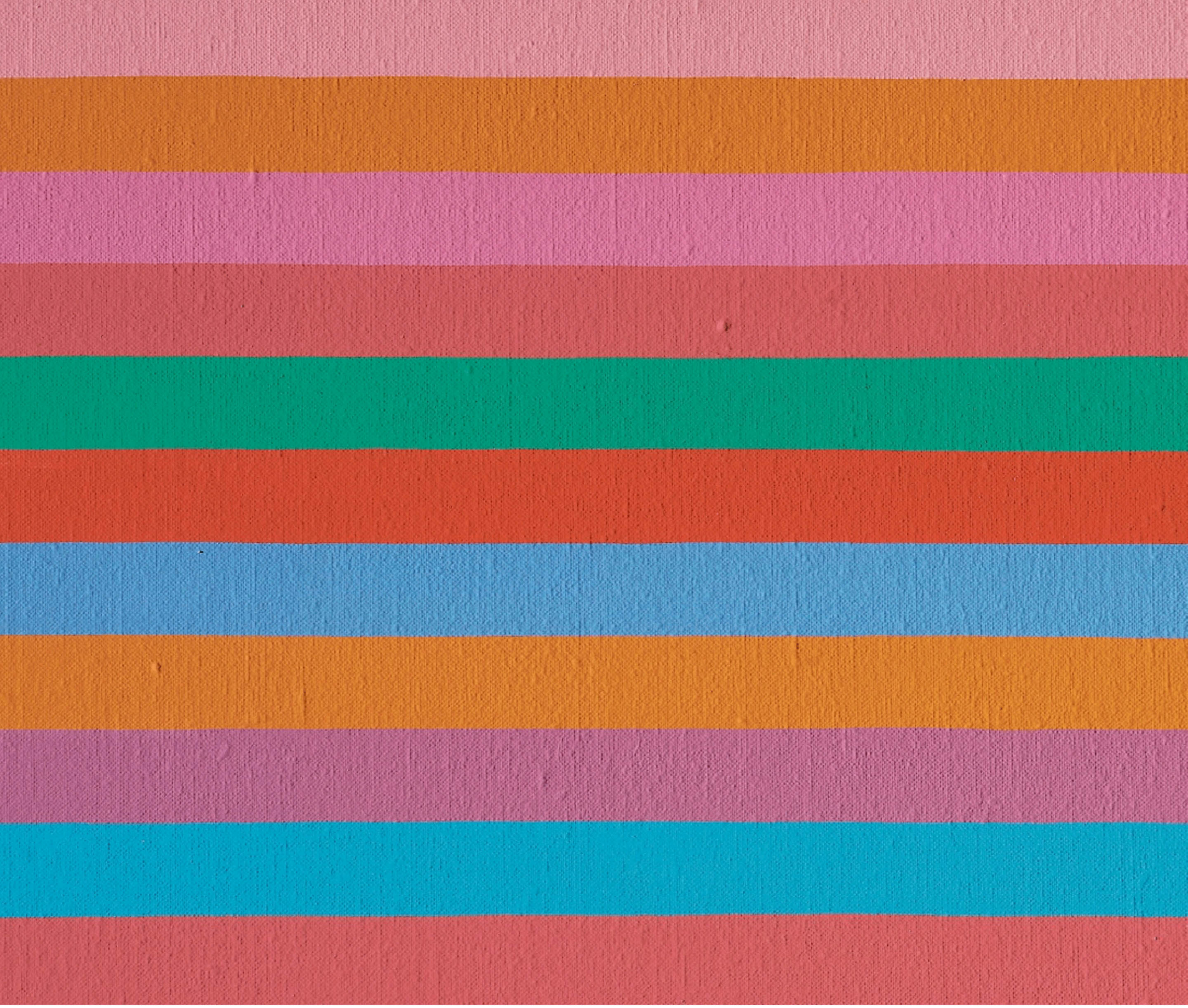
The global release of *A Pale View of Hills* is set to bring celebrity beyond her homeland. Next stop Hollywood? A home in the Hills? "Nope!" she says brightly. "I prefer Japan. I like how we live here, our sensibilities." She doesn't speak English and is content that way, but enjoys travelling when she can. In 2022 she spent a few nights in London performing at Sadler's Wells in Hideki Noda's *A Night at The Kabuki*, a retelling of *Romeo and Juliet* set in 12th-century Japan. Her schedule kept her so busy that she barely saw anything. "Though I did eat some good ramen," she laughs.

Her free time is spent much like any other Tokyoite in her mid-20s. Her hobbies, she says, are "food and alcohol! If there's a kind of food that catches my attention, I'll go to every place that makes it and find a place I like best." Lately she's been into tororo nabe, a Japanese hotpot dish made from grated yam that has a slimy consistency. "It's delicious," she promises.

And she's a seasoned kickboxer. "My older brother loved Jackie Chan and watched a lot of action movies when we were growing up, which is what got me into it," she says. "I've been doing it for so long that I can't give it up. I'm not good at yoga or weight training. I'd much rather do something more aggressive, where I can move." Could the skills learned in the dojo be applied to real life? She grins: "I think I can hold my own." ■**HTSI**

A Pale View of Hills is in UK cinemas from 13 March

Hair and make-up, Masayoshi Okudaira at Mayumi Yamanaka. Production, artProduction. On-set producer, Rosa Barbaran. Special thanks to Daikanyama Studio, Tokyo



Bridget Riley, *Rose Red*, 2012 (detail) © Bridget Riley 2026. All rights reserved

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HOW TO SPEND IT IN...

BEIRUT

Musician Yasmine Hamdan loves her hometown for its resilient spirit – and its chatty taxi drivers

INTERVIEW BY **ARWA HAIDER**
PHOTOGRAPHY BY **MARIA KLENNER**

Above: Beirut's Basta district. Right: Yasmine Hamdan at Salon Beyrouth. Bottom: the Corniche Beirut

I was born in Beirut in the middle of the civil war, which ran from 1975 to 1990. My mother tells me I was two weeks old when a bomb landed in our garden, below where I was sleeping – so we left. I lived my first years in Al Ain in the UAE, where my father was working as an engineer. We moved around a lot – from Athens to Kuwait – returning to Beirut at points in between.

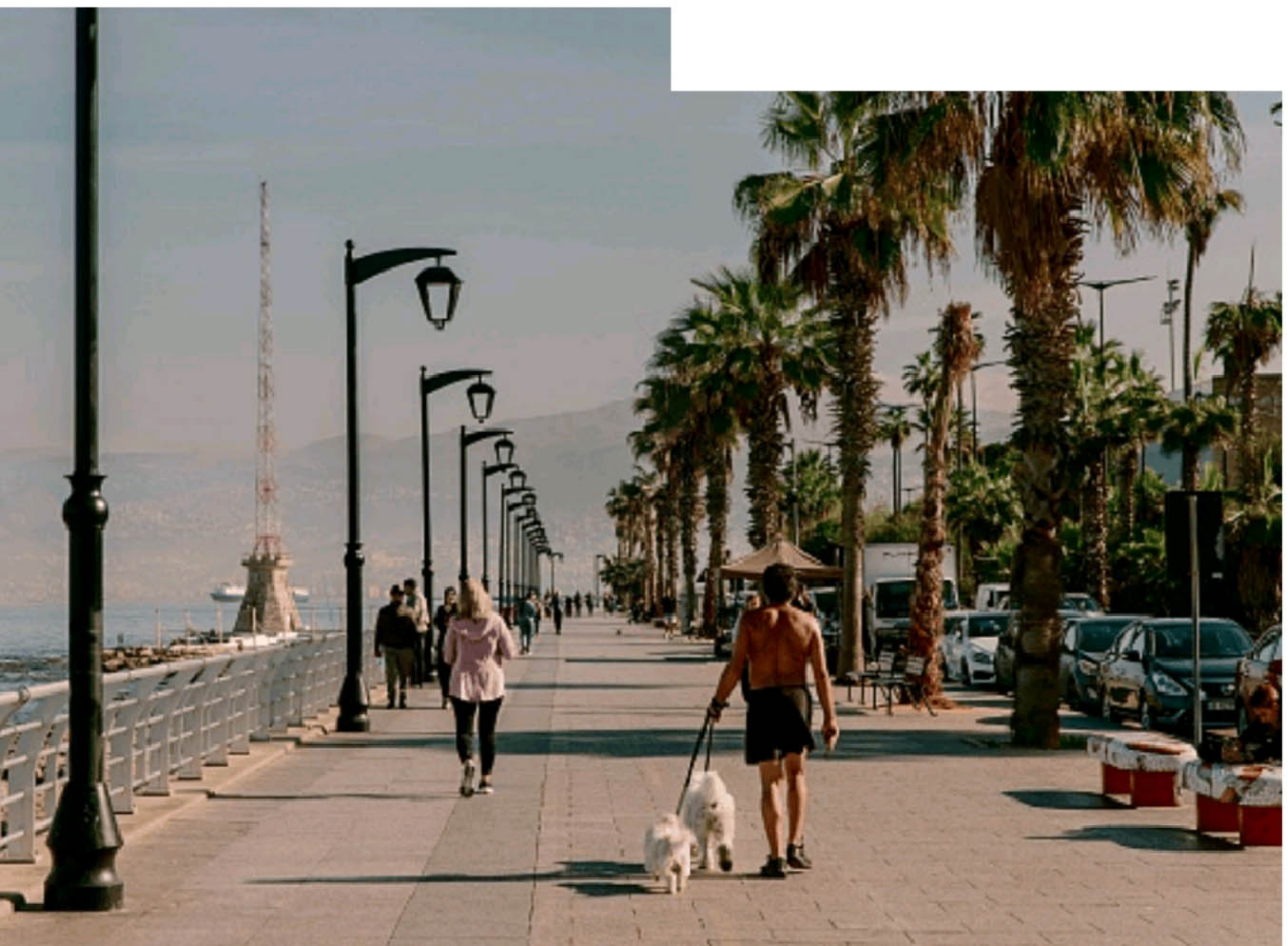
My family came back to settle in Beirut in the '90s, when I was a teenager. Battle scars were everywhere, but there was something very charming about the city. It was enigmatic, filled with animated light and sounds. When I started making music it felt like a refuge, helping me work through emotions I was struggling with.

I started my first band, Soap Kills [an indie duo with Lebanese music producer Zeid Hamdan], in Beirut in 1997, then moved to Paris to finish my psychology studies at the Sorbonne in 2005. I made the decision to stay in France a few years later, but I regularly visit Beirut to see family and friends.

My generation inherited an unresolved reality; we never had a chance to question the civil war. The "typical" Beiruti traits seem paradoxical: bombastic yet resilient; edgy yet conservative; unbreakable yet worn. I find conversations with taxi drivers – who connect with all communities across Beiruti society – particularly inspiring: political, funny, confiding. Often these conversations are my gateway into the city, beyond my bubble of friends and family.

I spent the summer in Beirut in 2021, when the city was grappling with an economic collapse, daily shortages of electricity and water, and the scars of the port explosion the year before. It was tough, but when I returned to Paris I carried back the first spark of my latest album: the song "Hon", which expresses the diaspora experience of witnessing such trauma through your phone. There is pain and isolation, but it's

BEIRUT SEEMS PARADOXICAL: EDGY YET CONSERVATIVE; UNBREAKABLE YET WORN



RAMLET AL-BAIDA BEACH

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Above: Salon Beyrouth (also pictured bottom left). Right: Hamdan wears Goodkill on Ramlet al-Baida beach. Below: Marfa' Projects gallery. Below right: an antique shop in Basta

LEBANON LIVES IN A VERY DIFFICULT MOMENT, YET EVERYONE HERE CONTINUES

also a testimony of love for Beirut. The artwork for the single is of Ramlet al-Baida, the city's last public beach. Beirut has always given me something, even in its hardest times. When I sing in Lebanese Arabic – which I entwine with traditional instruments and vintage synthesisers – I feel rooted.

Casablanca, an amazing bar and restaurant, hosted Soap Kills shows when it opened in the early 2000s. I still go there every time I visit Beirut. The owner, Johnny Farah, is a designer with an atelier that crafts beautiful leather bags. My husband, the Palestinian filmmaker Elia Suleiman, carries one in his film *It Must Be Heaven*, a comedy-drama about a Palestinian travelling around Paris and New York. Johnny and his family opened If, Beirut's first curated boutique, at the end of the '70s; it now stocks brands including Comme des Garçons and Yohji Yamamoto and has a second branch in New York. Some of my artist friends and I walked the catwalk when they held a fashion show in Beirut's city centre.

MY MOTHER LIVES IN A residential area close to Hamra, a vibrant neighbourhood with one of the busiest streets in the city. I'll often meet friends and family at Salon Beyrouth, a charming old house turned into a café-bar that hosts performances. I filmed a live version of my song "Beirut" there.

Nearby is Chico Records, a historic store founded in the '60s by the record producer Khatchik Mardirian, who worked with Ziad Rahbani, the artist son of Lebanese diva Fairuz. Khatchik's son Diran now runs this shop, which stocks rare and new vinyl by Arabic artists and international musicians.

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Basta was once a prestigious market district; today the area is a bit run-down. But it is still a nice place to hunt for unique pieces – lamps, watches and furniture from various periods – among the Ottoman-era buildings. The vendors are very friendly; I once bought a Berber carpet from a seller called Hassan, who is famous for making sure that no customer leaves his shop without eating a candy.

Beirut has a very creative community and there's always something happening. Metro Al Madina is a venue with an eclectic events programme, from Palestinian rap to cabaret, comedy shows, local and international bands and DJs. I watched an impressive Sufi music concert there with more than 15 percussionists and singers on stage. Zoukak Theatre is another space for performances and events, and also tours around Lebanon doing drama therapy workshops for marginalised communities. The last time I was there was for an electro-Arab DJ night.

For contemporary exhibitions, Marfa' Projects supports experimental and conceptual young artists from Lebanon and around the region. Marfa' means "port", which the gallery is right in front of. It suffered a lot of damage in the 2020 explosion, but it celebrated its 10th anniversary last year.

On weekends, my family and I like to go to Al Rawda, a peaceful garden café with a stunning view overlooking the sea. There's a small playground for kids and big tables, so it's ideal for a joyful get-together – I have a big family, with dozens of relatives across both sides. Mum & I, a restaurant by the National Museum, is another favourite. It's home-style cooking with the best mulukhiyah [a stew made from mallow leaves] and bamieh [okra stew] – both local specialities that are also popular in Syria, Palestine and Iraq. The chef-owner trained in France and came back to Beirut to open this place. I also go to an Armenian-Lebanese bistro in Badaro called Onno, which has finely diced salads, kibbeh with lentils and the best ful [fava bean stew].

My relationship with the city constantly shifts. Lebanon lives in a very difficult moment; the threat of war is renewed daily, there is an accumulation of traumas. Yet everyone here continues. New restaurants and bars are opening; planes are fully booked for the holidays; there is solidarity despite everything. Continuity, in times of despair and war, is a strength – and I am inspired by that. ■**HTSI**

I Remember, I Forget is out now via Crammed Discs. Yasmine Hamdan's European tour runs until 25 April; yasminehamdan.com

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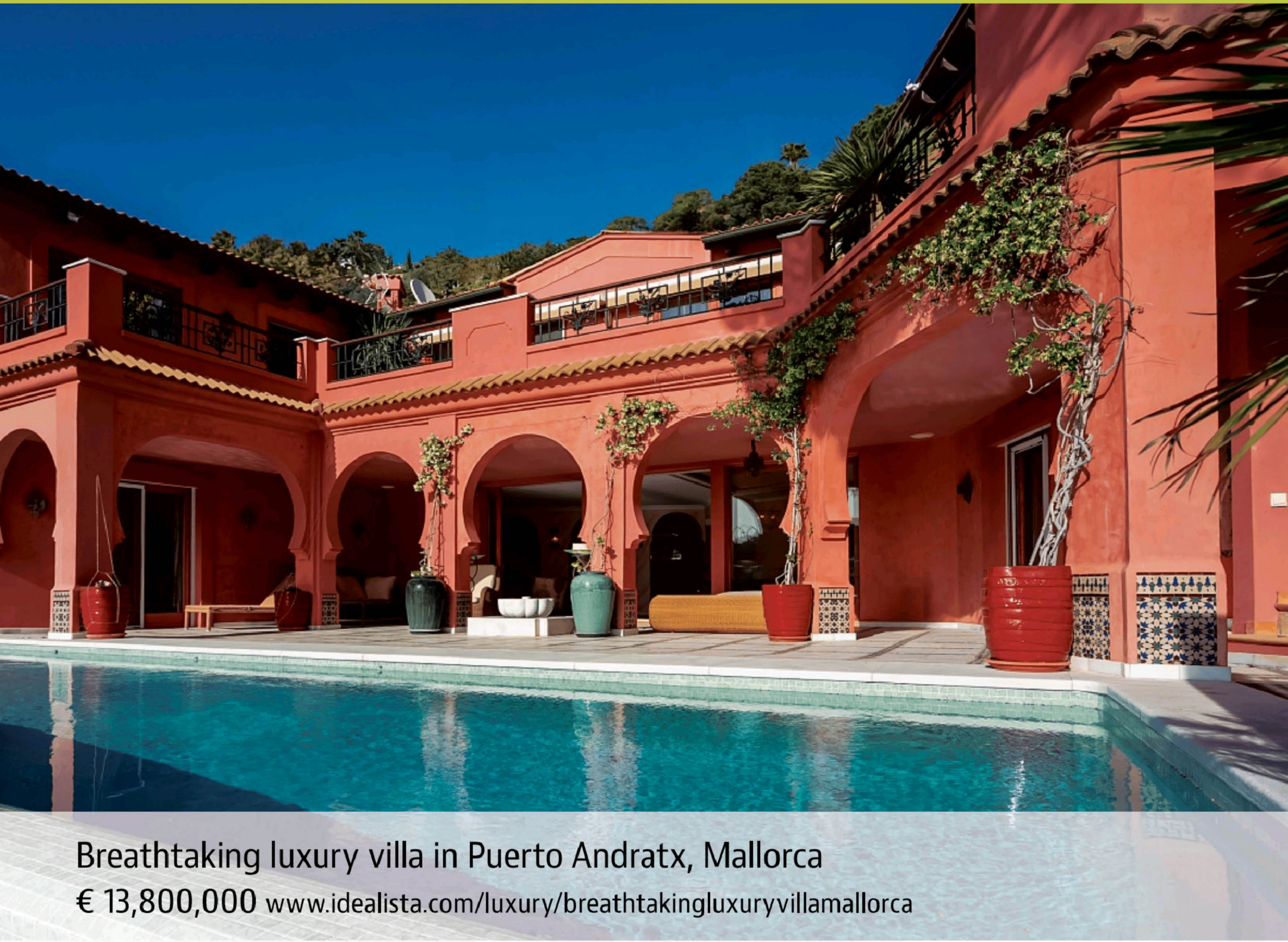

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TEXTILES

ASAFO FLAGS

As radical as they are radiant, Ghanaian military banners are flying once again

WORDS BY **CHARLENE PREMPEH**

Unpacking the meaning of an Asafo flag, the military banner first created in the coastal villages of Ghana in the 17th century, can feel like playing the cartoon caption game at the back of *The New Yorker*. You might find a man holding the moon above his head, flanked by two proud black birds against a faded pink and cream wall, or a mustard-coloured dog passing his bone to a chocolate canine under the Union Jack on patchy ink-blue textile, or two men wearing hats, poised to do battle, standing over a bowl, spoon and cup, with a St George's flag. What do the pictures mean?

The answers lie in the proverbs used by the Akan people, who live along the coast of Guinea, and in the culture of the Fante people of southern Ghana. The name Asafo, meaning "war people", refers to the military companies established by the Fante people to defend their communities. The flags were made in workshops and co-operatives using dyeing, embroidery and appliqué techniques. Usually measuring 3ft x 5ft, the flags subverted colonial symbolism by referencing proverbs that seemed innocuous to outsiders but were legible to the resistance movement, who used them for covert communication. A hunter facing a tortoise and snail, for instance, draws on the Akan proverb that warns against bringing a gun to hunt harmless prey.

By the time Ghana won independence from Britain in 1957, the flags had captured the imaginations of collectors and are now used in ways that go far beyond their designated purpose. Asafo flags have also become popular as part of a wider embrace of textile arts. Institutional exhibitions and museum acquisitions have reframed perceptions and prices. The flags have been "repositioned from being ethnographic artefacts and presented more as visual statements of satire and political critique", says Giles Peppiatt, director of modern and contemporary African art at Bonhams.

THE RESISTANCE MOVEMENT USED THEM AS COVERT COMMUNICATION

Kemide Lawson, co-founder of lifestyle store The Cornrow, discovered the flags when she was decorating her family home in north London. "With their bold use of colour combined with their intricate hand-appliquéd motifs, Asafo flags are simply stunning to look at," she says. "They felt unusual too: even my Ghanaian friends were unfamiliar with them. It made them seem like little-known masterpieces." The flags appear in the homes of model and activist Adwoa Aboah, who is part-Ghanaian, and French-Moroccan designer Ramdane Touhami, who has several hung in his Paris living room.

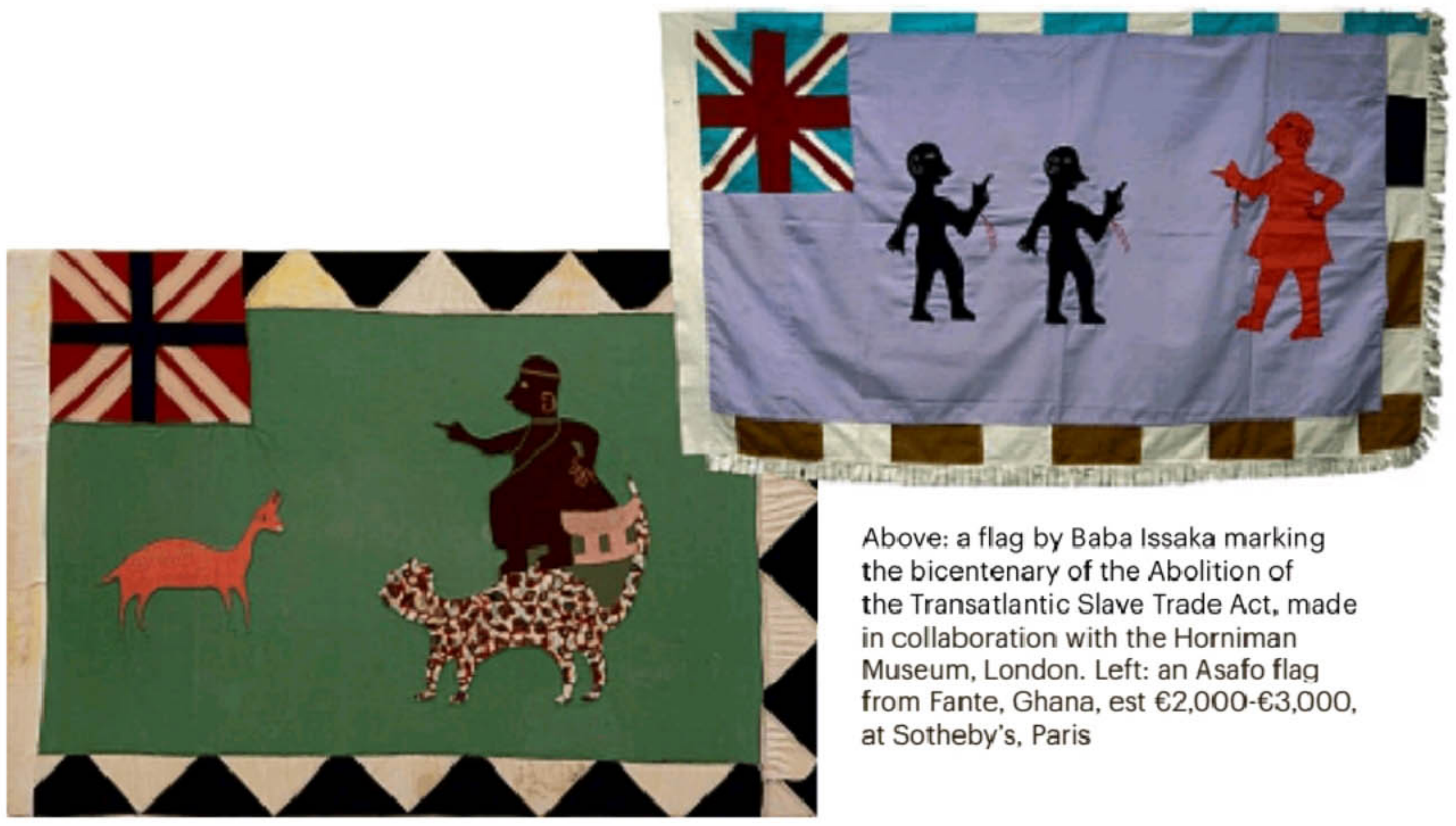
"The older flags are the most sought-after collectable pieces because of their rarity," says Barbara Eyeson, the London-based creative director of Asafo Flags, an educational resource and sales platform. Pre-1957 examples, particularly designs featuring the Union Jack, command premium prices: they are seen as artefacts of Fante culture during a particularly fraught moment in history, in contrast to newer works made with the art and tourist market in mind.

"There is a kind of 'golden age' between about 1910 and Ghana's independence in 1957," says Duncan Clarke, founder of Adire African Textiles in London. Key markers for this era are the Union Jack, a light patina, hand-stitching and cotton material. In rare cases, older flags may have small stamps or handwritten text stating the name of the maker. A recent Sotheby's auction in Paris included an undated flag incorporating a Union Jack with an estimate of €2,000 to €3,000. Eyeson currently has a 1940s flag by mid-20th-century master flagmaker Kweku Kakanu on sale for £4,500, which depicts the proverb "fish grow fat for the benefit of the crocodile, who rules the river".

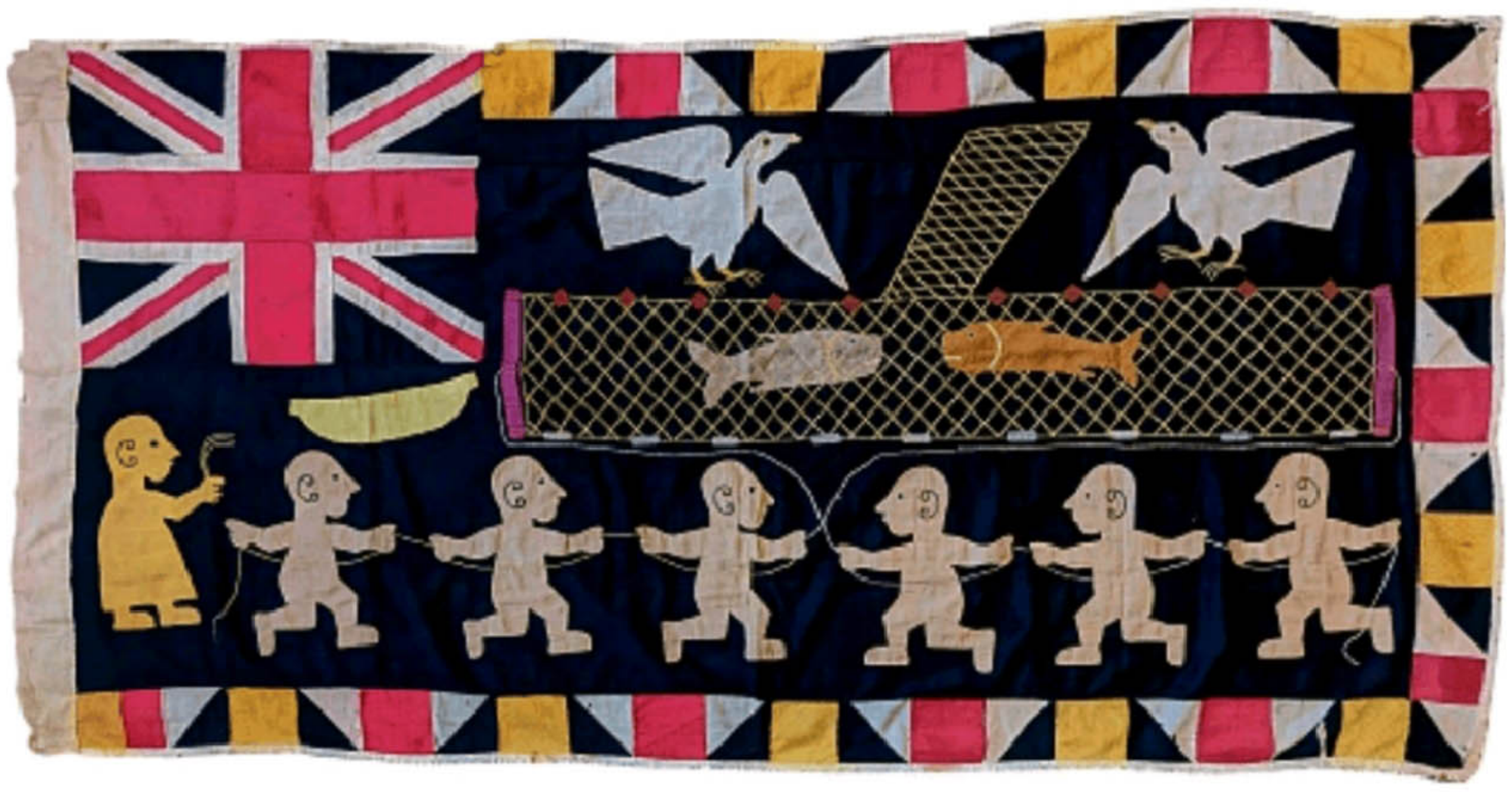
INTEREST HAS CLUSTERED around particular makers, including Kakanu, whose work has featured in the collections of the Smithsonian, Saint Louis Art Museum and Royal Ontario Museum. Kakanu worked from a workshop in Ghana's Saltpond area, experimenting with striking interpretations of proverbs. A brown and purple design from the 1950s, currently for sale at Adire African Textiles (£4,500), features a small figure with blood on his hand and face after touching a pond, a warning not to underestimate the danger beneath a calm appearance. In November, Clarke sold a yellow and red flag by Kakanu depicting the proverb "our enemies are caught like fish in the net" for more than £6,000.

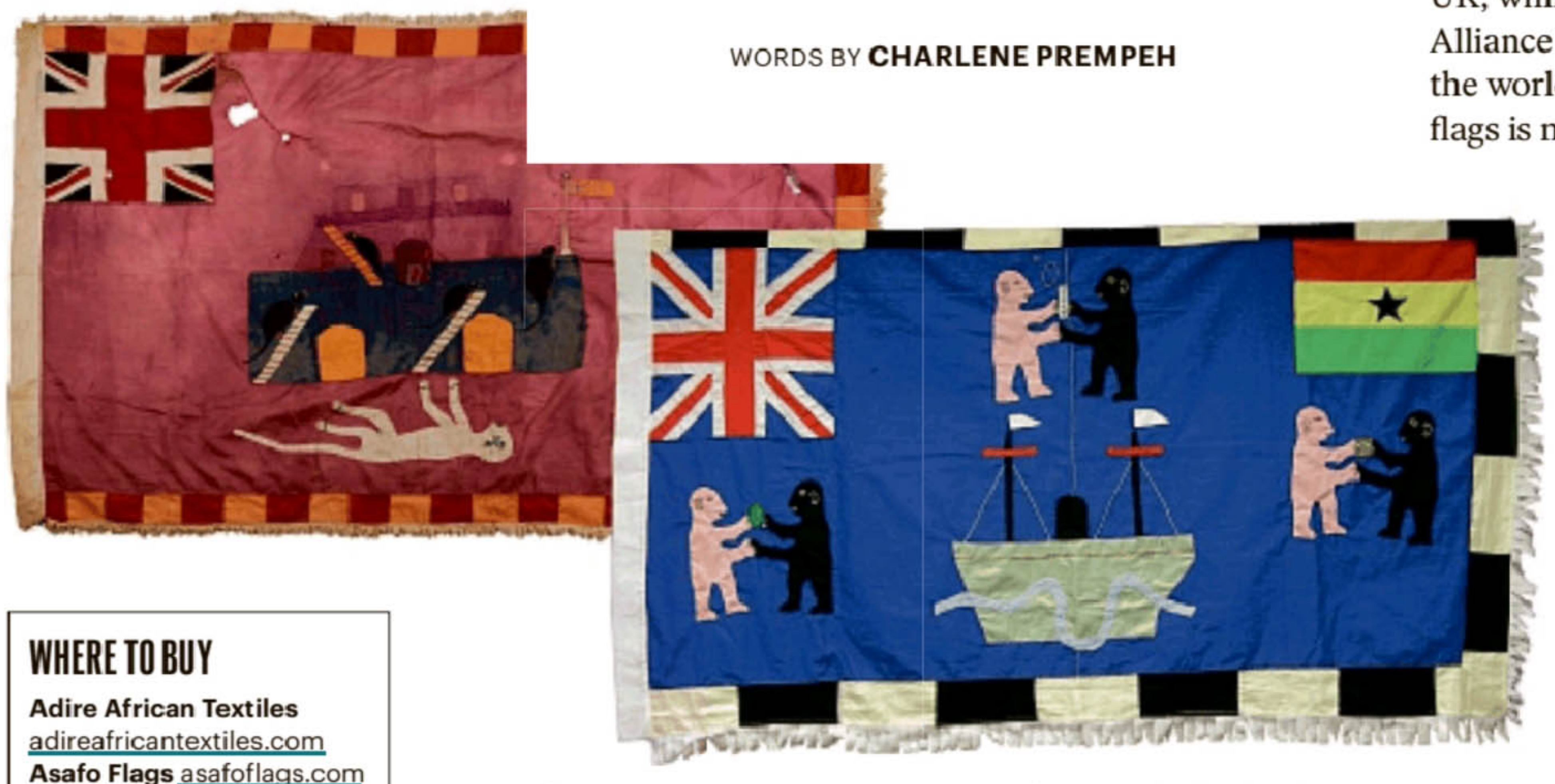
Eyeson stresses the importance of interrogating provenance. "A surge of dealers are labelling the flags as 'vintage' to command higher prices even though they were actually produced in the past 10 years," she says. Auction houses and specialist dealers such as Clarke and Eyeson are all credible options in the UK, while in Ghana there is the Artists Alliance Gallery in Accra (where one of the world's largest collections of Asafo flags is maintained) and Osabarimba Asafo Gallery in Cape Coast, which collaborates directly with makers.

Late last year, a collaboration between London's Horniman Museum and contemporary flagmaker Baba Issaka marked the bicentenary of the Abolition of the Transatlantic Slave Trade Act with six new flags that told stories of trade and abolition. As older master flagmakers retire, however, fewer young artists are emerging. Organisations that support new commissions and work with rare contemporary craftsmen are becoming vital in preserving these fast-disappearing skills. ■**HTSI**

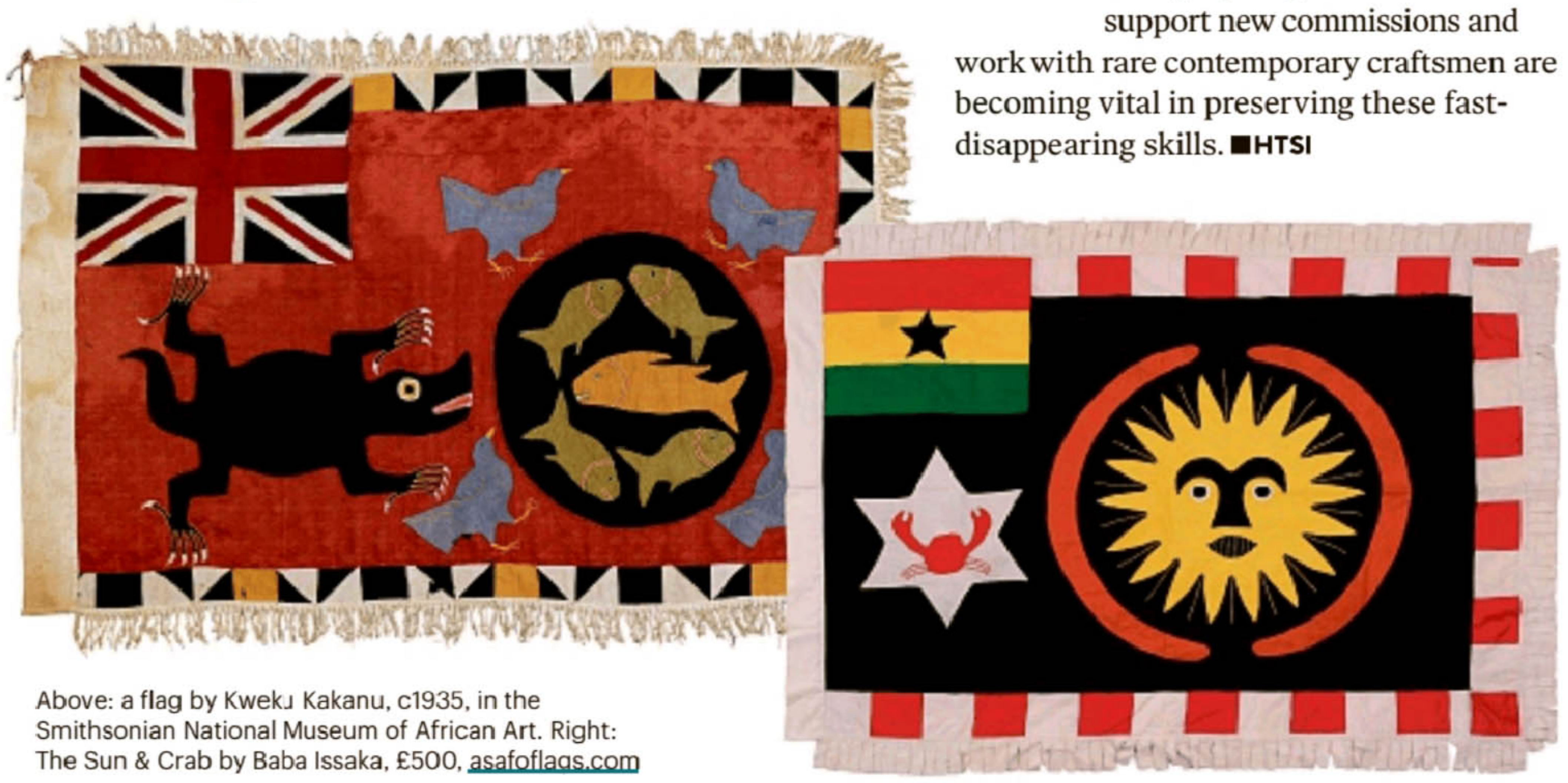


Above: a flag by Baba Issaka marking the bicentenary of the Abolition of the Transatlantic Slave Trade Act, made in collaboration with the Horniman Museum, London. Left: an Asafo flag from Fante, Ghana, est €2,000-€3,000, at Sotheby's, Paris





Above: a flag depicting the proverb "our enemies are caught like fish in the net" by Kweku Kakanu, sold for more than £6,000 at Adire African Textiles. Below: Cat & Mouse flag by Nana McCarthy, £3,500, asafoflags.com. Below right: a flag by Baba Issaka made in collaboration with the Horniman Museum



Above: a flag by Kweku Kakanu, c1935, in the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art. Right: The Sun & Crab by Baba Issaka, £500, asafoflags.com

WHERE TO BUY

Adire African Textiles adireafricantextiles.com
Asafo Flags asafoflags.com
Bonhams bonhams.com
Osabarimba Asafo Art Gallery asafogallery.org

WHAT TO READ

Asafo! African Flags of the Fante by Peter Adler and Nicholas Barnard

WHERE TO SEE

Artists Alliance Gallery
Omanye House, La Rd,
Accra, Ghana
High Museum of Art
1280 Peachtree Rd NE,
Atlanta, GA 30309
Karun Collection
karuncollection.com
Smithsonian National Museum of African Art,
950 Independence Ave SW,
Washington, DC 20560

PHOTOGRAPHS: BABA ISSAKA, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND THE HORNIMAN MUSEUM AND GARDENS (2). FRANCO KHOURY/NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AFRICAN ART/SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION. SOTHEBY'S

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龍美術館
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HOW TO HOST IT

TALK CHOP

Laila Gohar gathers her gang for a snowy Sunday roast

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **ADRIANNA GLAVIANO**

As I approach my 40th birthday, I've found myself reflecting on the past decade and the woman I am today. A defining moment was becoming a mother to Paz a couple of years ago. I realise now that, in preparation for his arrival, I subconsciously started surrounding myself with mothers like the one I hoped to become: strong women who love their children deeply, yet whose lives are rich with careers, passions and friendships beyond motherhood.

One of those women is Valentina Akerman, co-founder of the itinerant art space Galerie Sardine. The first time she walked into my apartment for a dinner party I was immediately drawn to her. Her long, dark hair fell in untamed waves and her bright-red lipstick framed a tiny gap between her front teeth that gave her a cheeky charm.

Valentina came from Bogotá to New York to study architecture at Columbia University, began working as an architect, and met her partner, the artist Joe Bradley, at a Brooklyn loft party 20 years ago. While pregnant with her son, Leif, she was diagnosed with thyroid cancer and found herself fighting for her life with a newborn. After making a recovery, she and Joe had three more children: Basil, Alma and Nova, each five years apart.

The couple have built a life that feels incredibly unguarded, bathed in colour, improvised and generous, not unlike Joe's paintings. They founded Galerie Sardine in their Amagansett farmhouse in 2024; since then they have had exhibitions in locations across Paris, Dijon and New York City. The original gallery was conceived as an intimate, lived-in setting rather than a white-cube space,

THE FIRST TIME I MET VALENTINA, I WAS DRAWN TO HER

Top: the author (right) serves the pork crown roast with (from left) Valentina Akerman and her children Basil and Alma. Above: the radicchio salad and potato gratin. Right: Akerman with her children and the author

HOW TO COOK A PORK CROWN ROAST

One pork crown (ask your butcher to prepare this for you; it usually comes with 16 chops, which serves 16 generously)
Two garlic bulbs, cloves peeled
15 sprigs of rosemary
About 10 sage leaves
20 anchovy fillets
Two lemons, peeled in strips
4tbsp salt
240ml olive oil

- Start the night before: put the garlic cloves, rosemary, sage, anchovies and lemon peel (you don't need the actual lemons) in a blender and pulse into a paste.
- Sprinkle the salt over the pork and add the paste, then the oil. Marinate in the fridge overnight.
- Remove the meat from the fridge two hours before you're ready to begin cooking. This allows the meat to cook more evenly.
- Use a piece of kitchen towel to wipe off the marinade before putting the pork in the oven (otherwise it might burn and become slightly bitter).
- Cook the pork at 210°C fan for 30 minutes or until it's properly brown. Then turn the oven down to 170°C fan and cook for two more hours, or until the meat's internal temperature reaches 63°C.
- Remove the pork crown from the oven and allow it to rest for at least 45 minutes before serving.

FINANCIAL TIMES

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MODERN-DAY MEDICI

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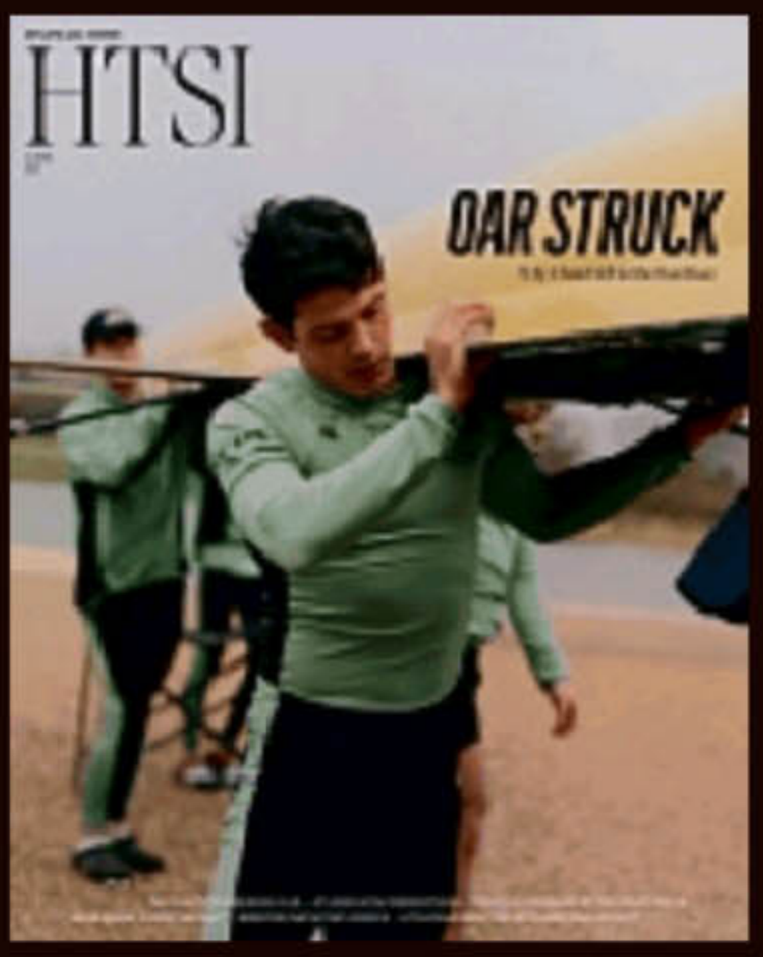
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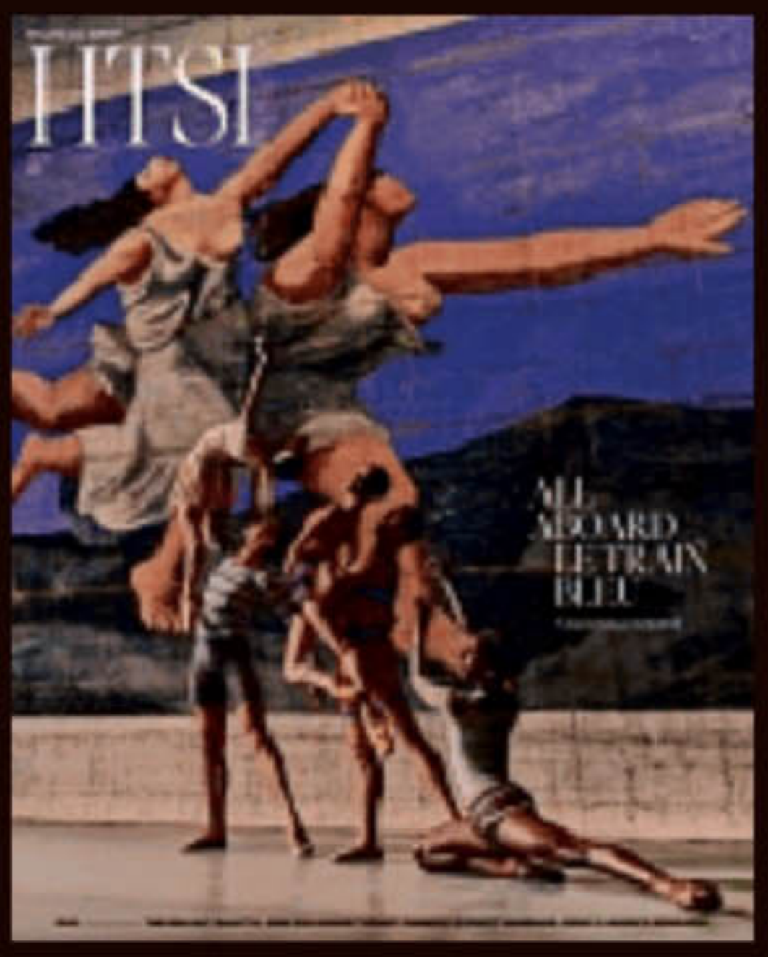
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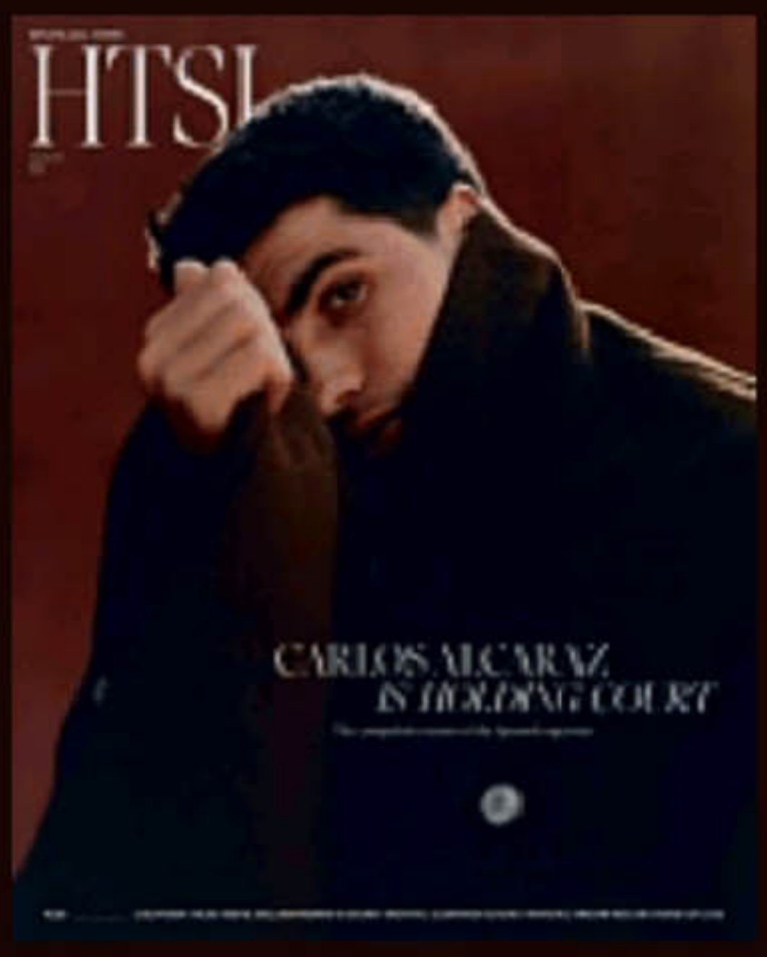
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CARLOS ALCARAZ IS HOLDING COURT

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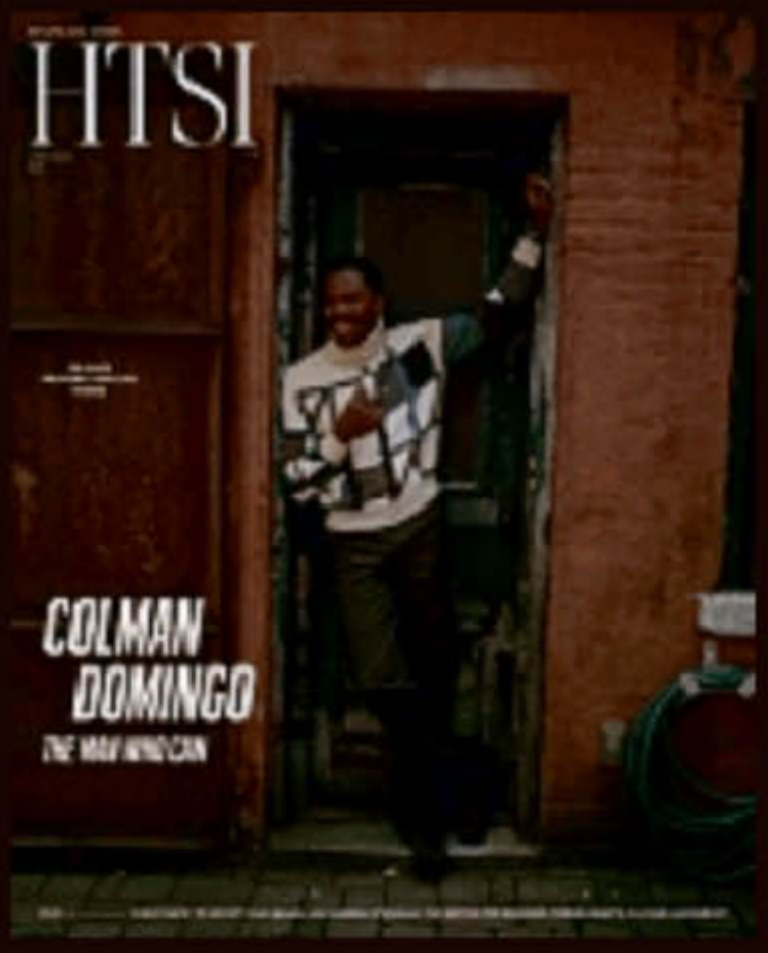
FREESTYLE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COLMAN DOMINGO

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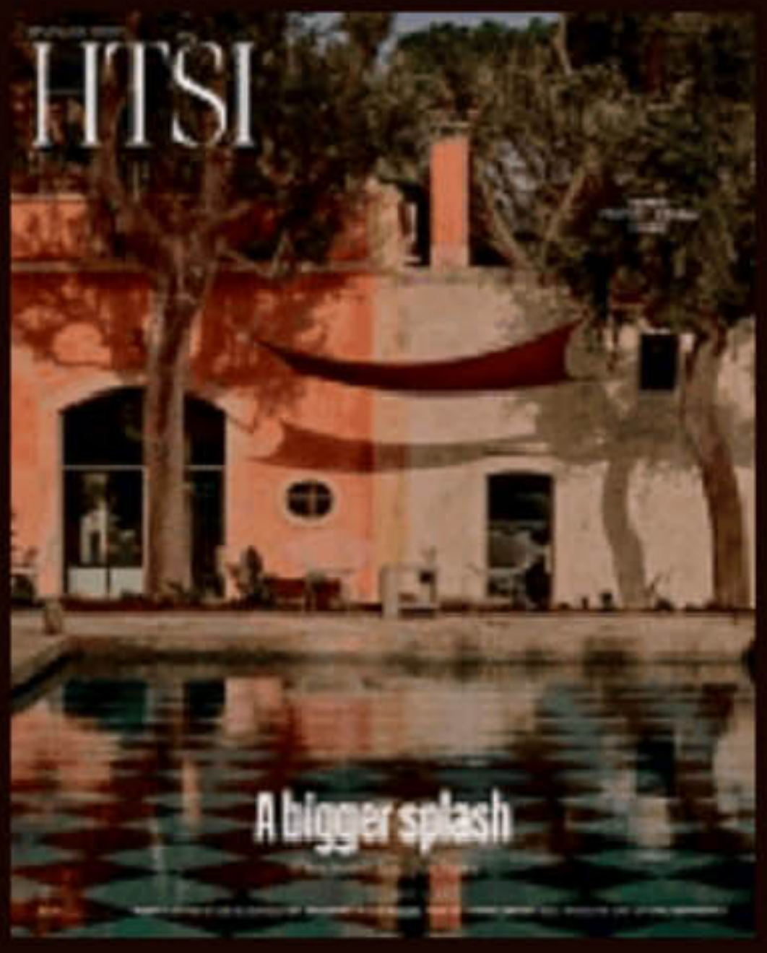
A VERY MODERN MAESTRO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A bigger splash

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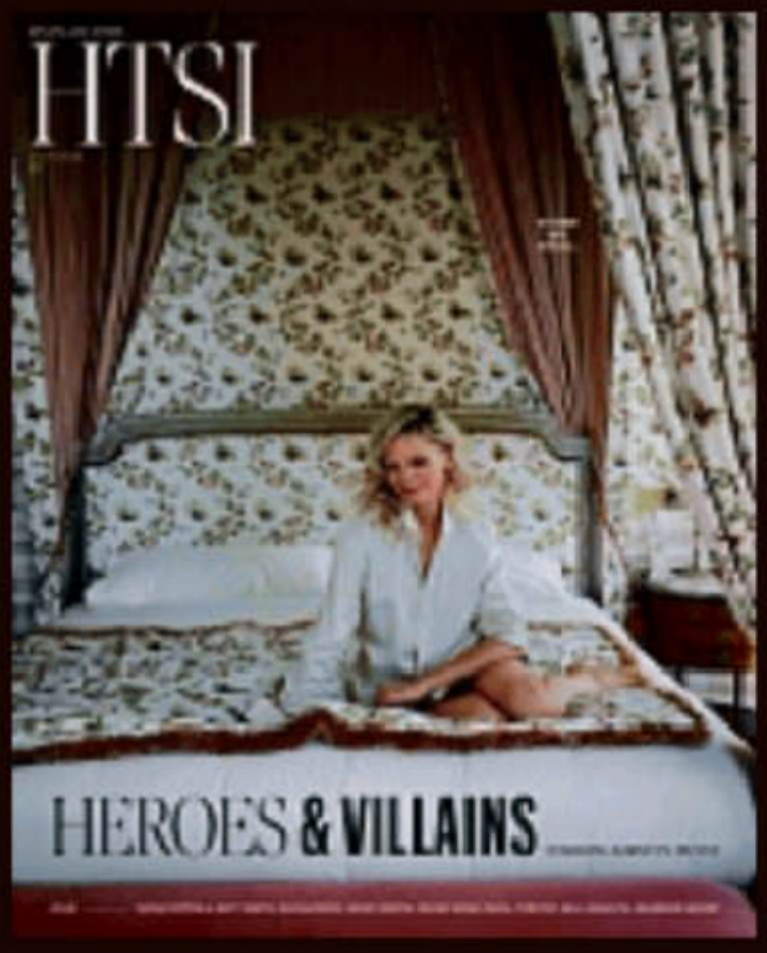
FASHION'S VANGUARD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HEROES & VILLAINS

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The modern gentleman

Never miss an issue

MARCH
7 March
14 March, *Men's Fashion*
21 March
28 March, *Property*

APRIL
4 April
11 April, *Design*
18 April, *Wedding*
25 April

MAY
2 May
9 May
16 May, *Travel*
23 May
30 May

JUNE
6 June
13 June
20 June, *Escape*
27 June, *Jewellery*

JULY
4 July
11 July, *Health & Fitness*

AUGUST
1 August
29 August

SEPTEMBER
5 September
12 September, *Women's Fashion*
19 September, *Men's Fashion*
26 September, *Arts*

OCTOBER
3 October
10 October, *Design*
17 October, *Wisely*
24 October, *Property*
31 October, *Travel*

NOVEMBER
7 November
14 November, *Holiday*
21 November
28 November, *Celebration*

DECEMBER
5 December
12 December, *Philanthropy*
19 December

Above, from left: architect Bill Katz, Akerman's mother Amalia Lú Posso Figueroa, the author's partner Ignacio Mattos and Akerman's daughter Basil

and much of the work – paintings, sculpture, objects and furniture – is made by their artist friends. Their first exhibition, held in summer 2024 at the farmhouse, was meant to be an intimate gathering, but soon ballooned into a 80-person sit-down dinner in the garden. Valentina had the kids carrying furniture over their heads and borrowing chairs from the neighbours. Watching her, I was reminded of a conductor getting ready for a symphony.

THE FAMILY HAS recently moved down the road from our Tribeca home. To mark the occasion, we decided to throw a Sunday lunch. Two days before, it became clear that New York was expecting a massive snowstorm. I texted Valentina to ask her what we should do, knowing perfectly well that her response would be: the show must go on.

And it did. I made a pork crown roast for no reason other than that it looked festive and over-the-top, and I love celebrating everyday life with something fancy. My partner Ignacio and I threw the roast into a basket with a magnum of champagne and marched through the snow to Joe and Valentina's loft.

I LOVE CELEBRATING EVERYDAY LIFE WITH SOMETHING FANCY

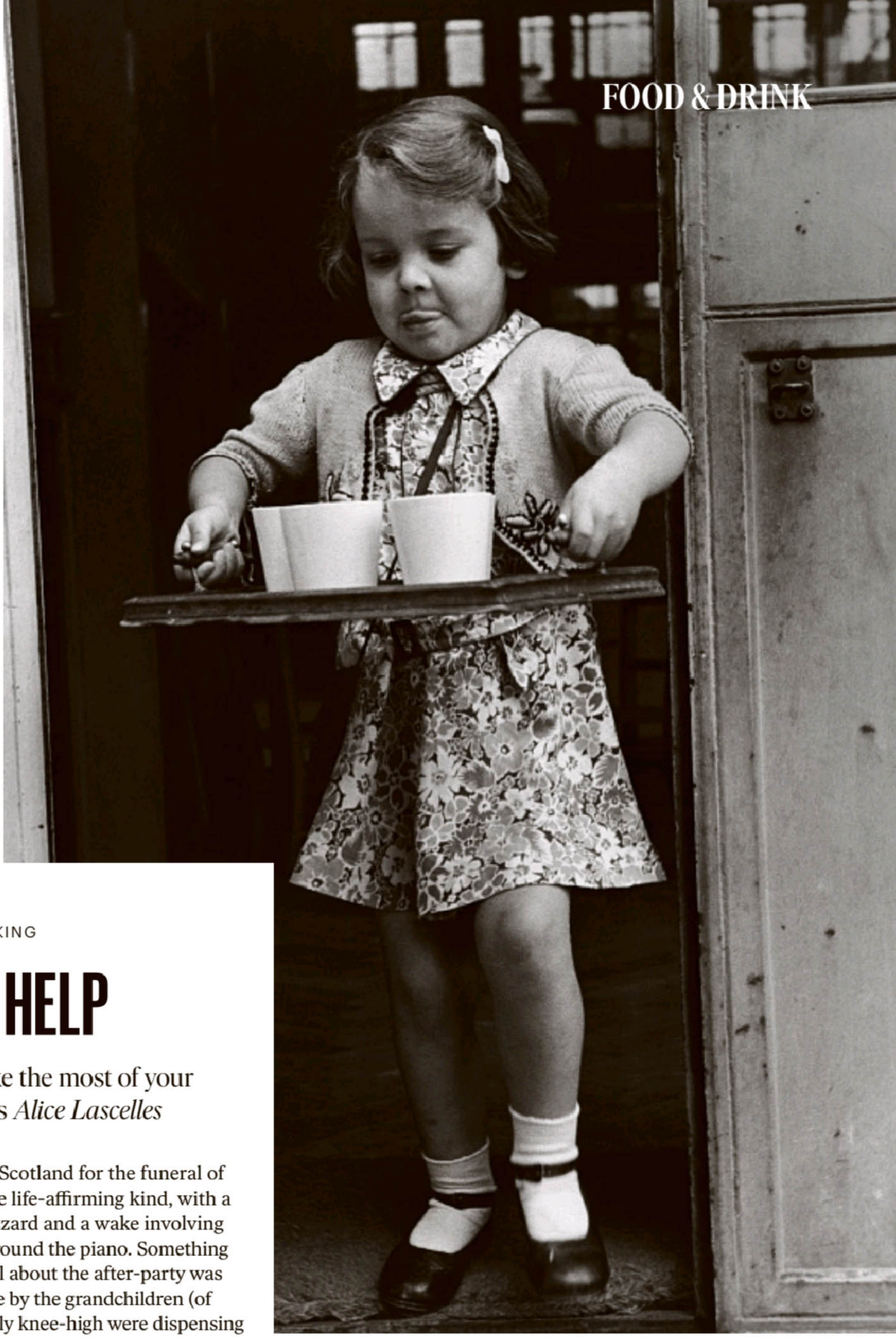
We were joined by Valentina's mother, Amalia Lú, an author and former Freudian psychologist, as well as the architect Bill Katz and our six combined children; everyone else cancelled because of the snow. Together we made a bitter radicchio salad as well as a potato gratin. Basil and Alma showed Paz how to place little gold crowns on the end of each chop.

Like much of what Valentina and I do – together and apart – the afternoon felt spontaneous, full of magic and imperfectly whole memories. The snowstorm made it all the better – as though we were doing something we weren't really supposed to. With Valentina I feel I am with a mother and a little girl all at once. ■**HTSI**

@lailacooks

PHOTOGRAPH: GETTY IMAGES

THE AUTHOR'S SON PAZ IN THE SNOW



DRINKING

HOME HELP

Having a party? Make the most of your in-house staff, says *Alice Lascelles*

Earlier this year I went to Scotland for the funeral of a family friend. It was the life-affirming kind, with a moorland burial in a blizzard and a wake involving lots of wine and singing round the piano. Something I found particularly joyful about the after-party was that the waiting was done by the grandchildren (of which there were 12). Kids barely knee-high were dispensing crisps and burgundy like there was no tomorrow.

It made me think how rarely you see children helping out at parties these days. If they're in the building at all, they're usually confined somewhere upstairs with an iPad.

When I was small my parents entertained a lot and I was often drafted in to hand round snacks. I loved it – you could mainline vol-au-vents, eavesdrop on adult gossip and minesweep left-over drinks. It made you feel important – and if you were really lucky you might get 50p.

Is it overzealous safeguarding that stops today's parents from putting their kids to work? Or the easy lure of tech? I've certainly been guilty of letting Netflix be nanny when I've hosted parties in the past. Perhaps modern children are just more work-shy? Or the parents less laissez-faire. Whatever the reason, it's a shame.

I asked around to see if others helped out at their parents' parties – and was hit with a deluge of replies. I heard tales of children being entrusted with cocktail trollies, working as "croupiers" and mixing rum punch. Others wrote menus, took guests' orders and even cleaned up after events.

As a boy, the lawyer Philip Astor was charged with serving the sloe gin at shoots on his family's Scottish estate. These days, thousands tune in nightly to his wife's Instagram feed – @justinepicardie – to see him mix cocktails from the "grog tray". A job prepping canapés, meanwhile, set a friend on the path to becoming a successful stylist.

For some, the experience was an important lesson in the art of hospitality. "My father taught me: never offer 'more wine' as 'more' implies the guest has had enough," says Ben Gordon, MD of the Chilean winery Bodega Volcanes. "Just pour or simply offer 'wine'. To this day I serve in this way."

Award-winning mixologist and bar owner Ryan Chetiyawardana – aka Mr Lyan – recalls helping out at family parties "from about the age of five. My siblings and I were involved in everything – cooking, clearing up, pouring wine. We liked it because it felt like being treated like an adult, it brought us into the room."

Tipsy guests were ripe for exploitation – and children took full advantage, setting up guerrilla coat checks and charging their parents' friends to use the lavatory. Some more brazen entrepreneurs even brandished tip jars. "One evening the tips were so good," recalls one friend, "they were 'taxed' by my mother."

KIDS WERE DISPENSING CRISPS AND BURGUNDY LIKE THERE WAS NO TOMORROW

Bellini Travel founder Emily FitzRoy often buttled at her parents' parties as a child – "I can still remember the smell of the coat pile on my parents' bed," she says. These days she encourages her own children to help out as she once did. "My 13-year-old loves it – she's been 'behind the green baize door' since she was small," says FitzRoy, showing me a picture of her daughter's tip jar stuffed with chewing gum and cash.

FitzRoy blames the demise of the child waiter partly on "that slightly naff American thing" of using professional caterers for domestic events. "You can have people behind the scenes, of course," she acquiesces, "but it's about getting the mix right." If we were all a bit less perfectionist, perhaps, parties might be a bit more fun. So next time you host a bash, let the kids loose with the corkscrew – what could possibly go wrong? ■**HTSI**

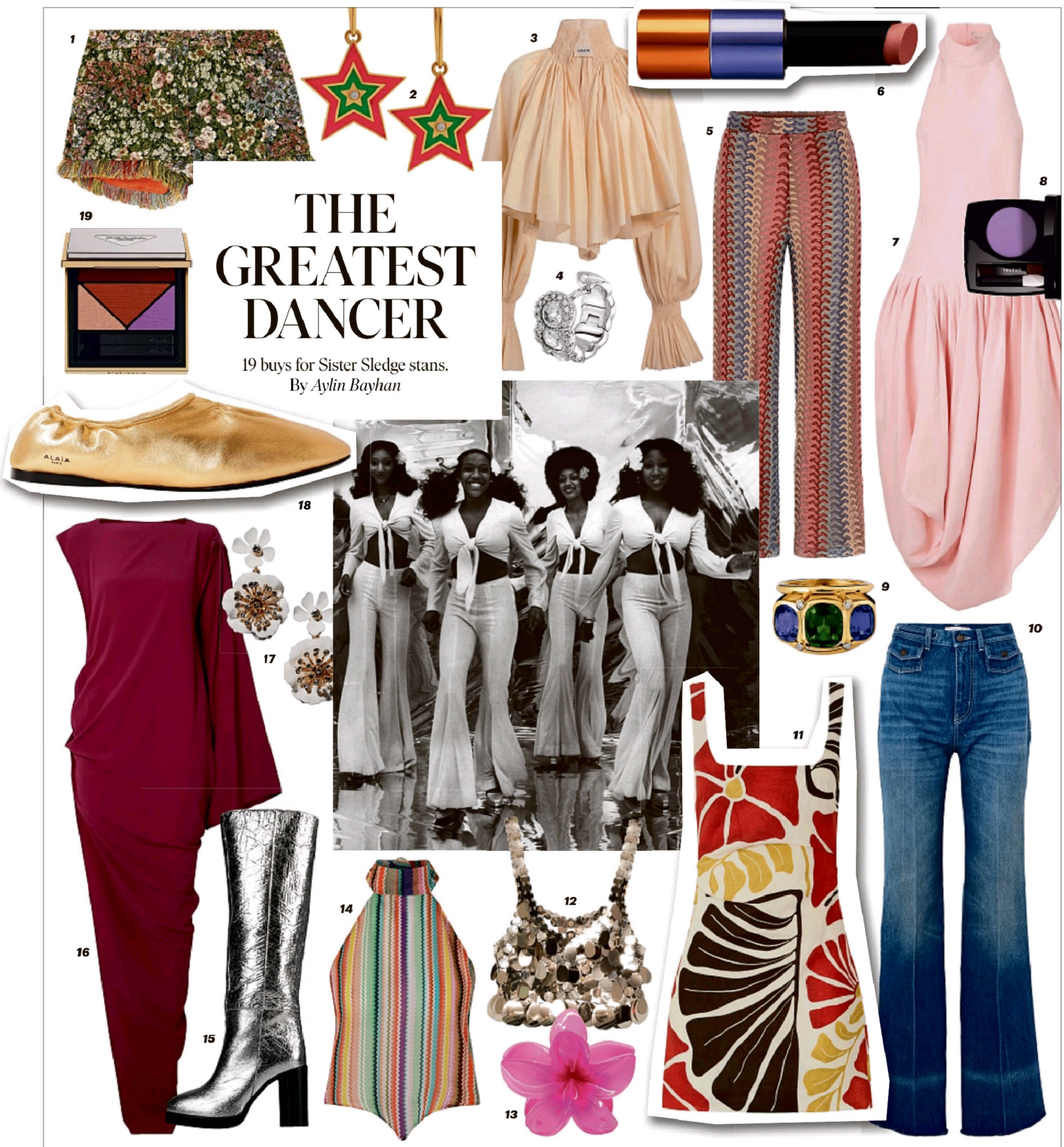
@alicelascelles

HOW TO SHOP IT

THE GREATEST DANCER

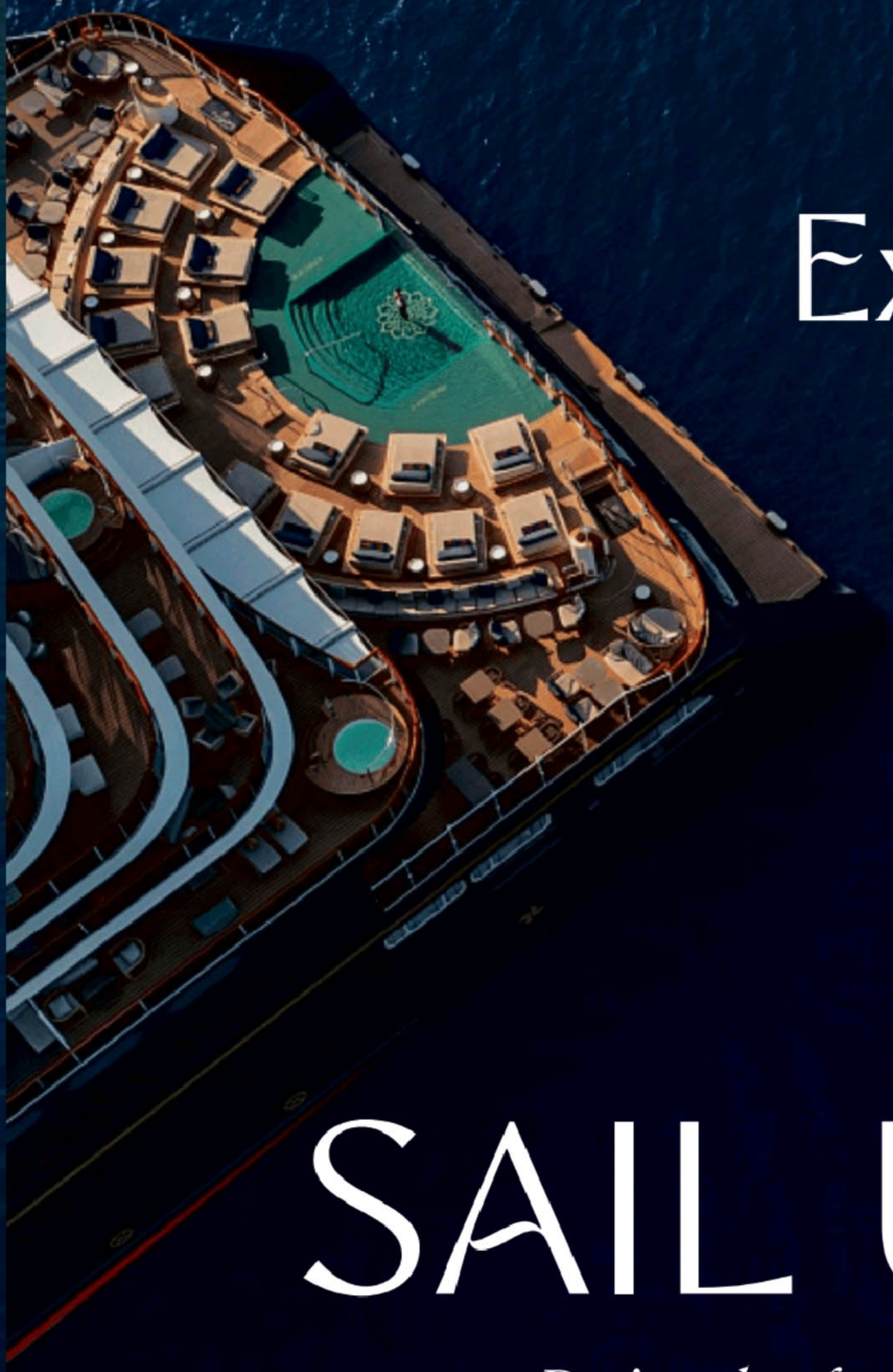
19 buys for Sister Sledge stans.

By *Aylin Bayhan*



The inspiration Sister Sledge c1975. **1** VALENTINO poly-mix fringed Après l'Hiver Gobelin shorts, £1,120. **2** ILEANA MAKRI gold-plated silver, zircon and enamel Star Burst Hoop earrings, €161.29. **3** KHAITE cotton-mix Durer blouse, £2,190. **4** DAVID MORRIS white-gold and diamond single earring, £5,300. **5** GUESS viscose-mix trousers, £95. **6** HERMÈS Silky Lipstick Shine in Beige Halo, £71. **7** MAGDA BUTRYM silk Magda dress, £2,295, net-a-porter.com. **8** CHANEL Ombre Essentielle eyeshadow in Lilas Poudré, £36. **9** CASSANDRA GOAD gold, diamond, tourmaline and iolite Ozymandias ring, £14,700. **10** CHLOÉ denim high-rise flared jeans, £910. **11** SIR THE LABEL linen Julietta mini dress, £320, flannels.com. **12** RABANNE polyester steel-disc embellished crop top, £1,420, farfetch.com. **13** EMI JAY cellulose-acetate Super Bloom hair clip, £14, selfridges.com. **14** MISSONI cotton/silk halterneck top, £510, net-a-porter.com. **15** ISABEL MARANT leather boots, £1,097, yoox.com. **16** RICK OWENS acetate/silk Edfu gown, £1,350, net-a-porter.com. **17** CAROLINA HERRERA brass, steel, cubic zircon, enamel and glass Floral Dangle earrings, £360. **18** ALAÏA leather ballet flats, £900, net-a-porter.com. **19** PRADA Dimensions Durable refillable eyeshadow palette in 01 Portrait, £67, selfridges.com

PHOTOGRAPH: ECHOES/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES



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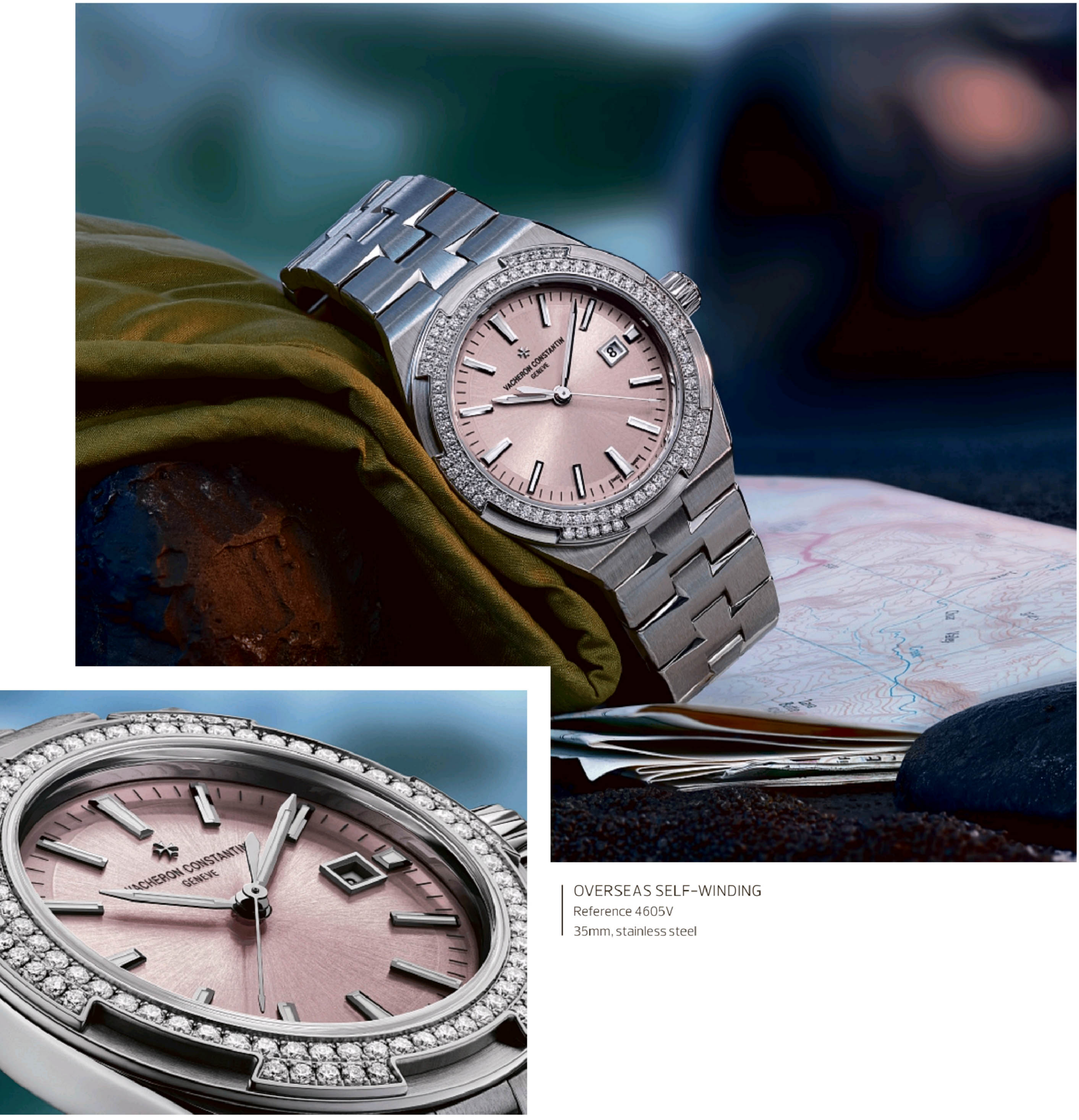

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